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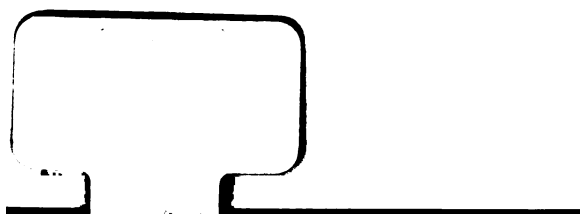
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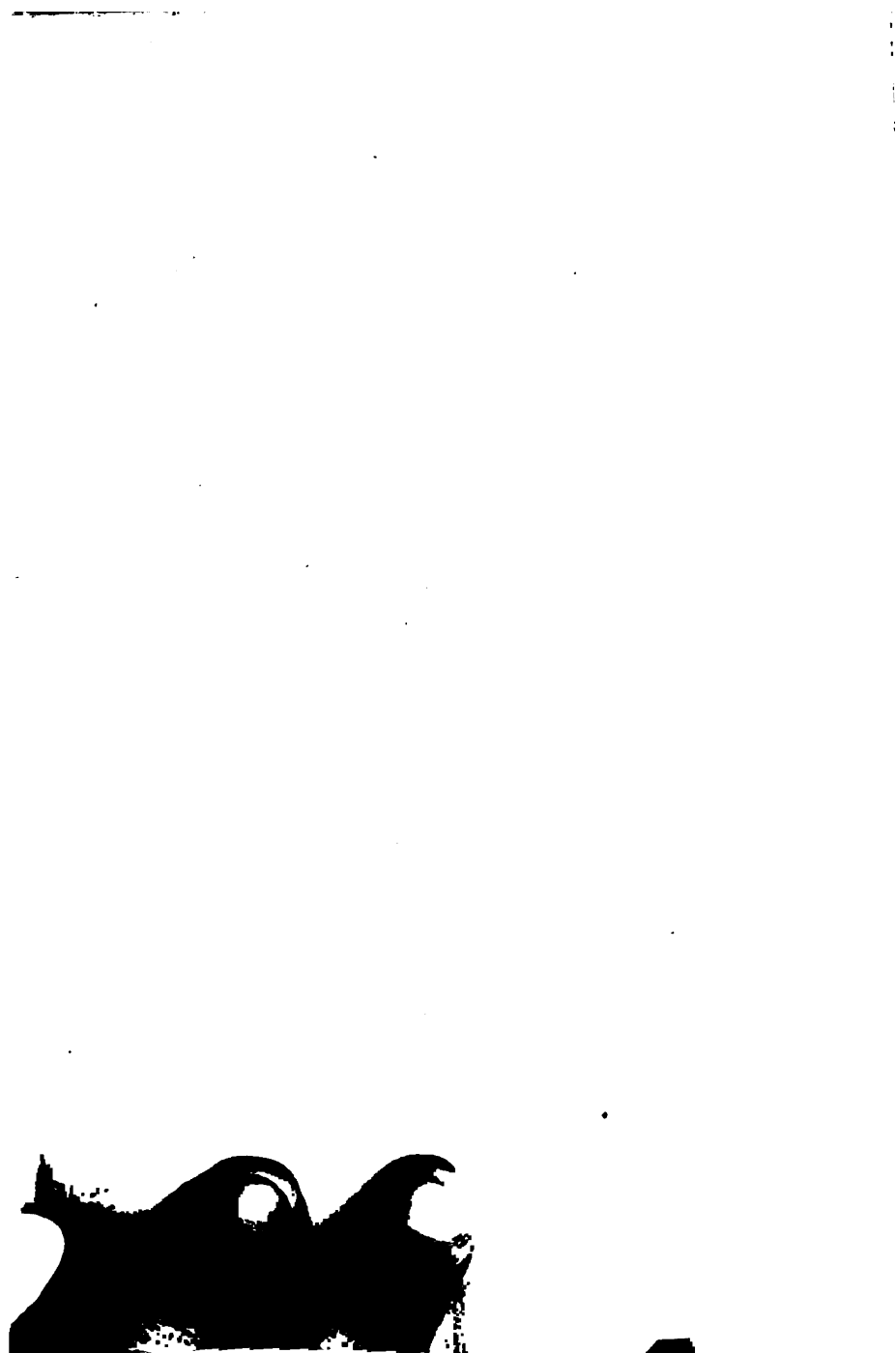
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PATRICIA KEMBALL.

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VOL. III.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the asymptotic behavior of the solutions of the system of equations

2. The second part of the paper is devoted to the study of the asymptotic behavior of the solutions of the system of equations

3. The third part of the paper is devoted to the study of the asymptotic behavior of the solutions of the system of equations

# PATRICIA KEMBALL:

A Nobel.

By E. LYNN LINTON,

AUTHOR OF "LIZZIE LORTON OF GREYRIGG," "THE TRUE HISTORY OF JOSHUA  
DAVIDSON," ETC.

"This life  
Of error, ignorance, and strife,  
Where nothing is, but all things seem."

THREE VOLUMES.—III.



London :

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.

1875.

251. b. 572.



LONDON :  
PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO.,  
CITY ROAD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ORDEAL.

**M**R. HAMLEY'S making-up day with the bank came round, and his books and cheques were sent up to Abbey Holme as usual. He sat in his private study; not the larger library where Patricia used to go for big books and brain-bewilderment, and where he was wont to receive his more special visitors when he wished to impress them as a man of culture as well as of substance; but in the smaller "Growlery," as he used to call it, which the upholsterer and the gilder had made as fine and shining as a newly-minted sovereign. He himself, clad in his gorgeous Oriental morning-gown, clean, perfumed, his hair well oiled, his whiskers curled and lustrous, every point of him prosperous, and every line of him magnificent, was a fit inmate of that gorgeous, glittering, florid little room. As he sat in his big arm-chair and balanced his counterfoils

and his cheques, his payings-in and his drawings-out with method and satisfaction, he looked the type of vulgar affluence, of sensual, social contentment. There did not seem to be a crook in his lot anywhere; not one invading fly to disturb the sweetness of his fat and fragrant ointment.

Cheque by cheque and voucher by voucher, scrip and warrant, dividend and rent, all was exact and all satisfactory; when suddenly he gave a surprised snort and jumped with an undignified kind of bound in his chair. A cheque which was none of his, but which was signed with such a perfect imitation of his handwriting that he could scarcely disbelieve its evidence, came out from among the rest, and for a moment staggered him. "Pay self or bearer one hundred pounds:" signed Jabez Hamley, and dated about three weeks ago. He might look at it till his eyes ached, he could make no more nor less of it than a cheque with his name to it, and a hundred pounds written off his balance. It was a forgery, but so neatly done that he had to be quite sure of his unvarying exactness not to be forced to accept it as his own.

After examining it all round, balancing his figures again and again, hunting through and through his books and papers with no better result than at first,

he wrote a hurried note to Mr. Wells, the bank manager, and sent off a man on horseback to Milltown at hot speed; which note had the effect of bringing up that gentleman, also at hot speed, with a scared and troubled face.

"Here's a mystery somewheres, Wells," said Mr. Hamley, flicking the cheque with his forefinger. "Here's a bit of paper that I never put pen to—that I'll swear!"

"Surely, sir, surely!" said Mr. Wells, in a deprecating tone.

He thought the prosperous brewer a little out in his objection.

"I suppose I may be allowed to recognise my own handwriting!" said Mr. Hamley haughtily.

"Certainly, sir; but when a member of your family presents a cheque signed—or apparently signed, let us say, for argument's sake—by yourself, and asks for it specially in gold, one is not likely to suspect any mistake. Especially with such a signature," Mr. Wells replied. "I happen to know all about it, for I was in the bank at the time, and I remember the circumstance accurately."

He took up several of the cheques, one after the other, and compared them with the one which Mr. Hamley disowned. Not the cleverest expert could

have told the difference between this and those acknowledged. The method of filling in was precisely the same, and the "Jabez Hamley" was fac-simile. Like many men of his kind, Mr. Hamley had never been able to conquer satisfactorily the mysteries of caligraphy. He spoke pompously, but he wrote meanly; an uneducated, rude sort of hand, both pinched and illegible. His signature however, was his strong point. With infinite pains he had elaborated a special cipher which he considered inimitable. The way in which the H joined on to the z was to his mind a marvel of ingenuity; but because it was so ingenious it was also the easiest thing in the world to copy. One "Jabez Hamley" was just like another "Jabez Hamley;" and the flourish at the end, with the loops intersected at precisely the same point, and the three spots in the middle, was always done as exactly as if it had been lithographed. It was a signature no more difficult to imitate than so much print, and so far was characteristic of the ordinary knave, inasmuch as it imagined itself inscrutable and was patent.

"Which member of my family?" asked Mr. Hamley in a tone of surprise. "Oblige me with the name."

"One of your young ladies," said Mr. Wells.  
"And I do not know her name."

Mr. Hamley's florid face grew several shades paler. For a moment he did not answer. Was he on the track of a mystery ? beginning with that roll of ten sovereigns, had it gone on to this daring deed of iniquity ?

As Dora was out of the question, was it possible that Patricia Kemball, with all her directness and apparent honesty, was in reality only a thief ? a forger ? and if so, why ? and under whose instruction ? "She was far too big a fool," he said to himself, "to do this thing alone. Who then, was her confederate ? Who egged her on ? Who backed her up ?"

Mr. Hamley was not a cruel man, save to his early patrons or fore-time tyrants, and he was truly sorry for Patricia, supposing it to be she ; for his wife, too ; but he was a magistrate as well as a host and a husband, and he had his duty to society to perform like a man and a citizen. And he had also his duty to perform to Dora. He thought of all this rapidly. He must have it made quite clear to Mr. Wells that the member of his family, the young lady of whom he spoke, was not his cousin, Dora Drummond. It was bad enough as it was, whoever it might be. Had it been indeed the other ? Even to Mr. Hamley, prosperous, affluent,



well oiled, and trimly brushed, life would have lost its savour had Dora Drummond proved a failure. No, he must have no suspicion rest on her pure head. It was a sad alternative, truly; and he pitied that misguided young person, Patricia, profoundly, supposing she was to be convicted; but justice compelled him.

He rang the bell.

"My compliments to the two young ladies, and beg them to step this way," said Mr. Hamley to the servant.

In a few moments the girls appeared, both looking as was their wont, save that Dora was just a little paler than usual. Graceful, self-possessed, and yet not in the least assertive, she came in with her pretty bending action and sweet amiability of face, followed by Patricia, tall and upright, with her large inquiring eyes and child-like unconsciousness, looking half-amused and half-amazed as to what Mr. Hamley could possibly want with them.

"Be seated, young ladies," said Mr. Hamley, waving his hand magisterially.

The girls, greatly wondering, sat down—at least, Patricia wondered and Dora feigned that she did. In reality she knew the whole thing by heart, and was aware that Patricia's ordeal, and in consequence

her own fate, were both at hand. One glance at the bank manager, at the open cheque-book, and the cancelled cheques—at *that* cheque lying uppermost, more than all—told her the name of the mystery, and why they had been summoned. But she took her chair peacefully, and sat with meek attention on her face, waiting.

“Which young lady?” said Mr. Hamley, not without a secret hope that there had been a mistake, and that the person who presented the cheque might be found to have been only a servant in her holiday clothes; and of course the ruin of only a servant was but a trivial affair.

“That one,” answered Mr. Wells, pointing to Patricia.

Patricia looked frankly into his face; Dora by a side-glance, seeing what she did, turned her pretty head also, and looked up like Patricia at the manager.

“You are sure?” demanded Mr. Hamley; and, in spite of himself, his voice trembled.

He did not like Patricia over-well; but to find her guilty of forgery was rather different from finding her too full of energy, more direct than he considered lady-like, and not half as pliant as she should be.

“Ask the young lady herself,” said Mr. Wells.

"Did you perform this action, Miss Kemball?" asked Mr. Hamley.

He called her by her surname purposely, that Dora's might be held clear.

"Perform what?" asked Patricia.

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Hamley came in. She had no idea of a conclave in which she had not her place; and where the girls were she felt she had the right to be also.

"Come, this is too strong! Did you present this cheque to the bank on the third?" said Mr. Hamley.

"I took a cheque to the bank, certainly, but I forget if it was on the third," said Patricia; "and I do not know if it was that one or not."

"Then you did not do this yourself?" Mr. Hamley demanded.

"Do what?—I do not understand," she answered.

"I will be explicit. Did you or did you not sign a cheque with my name—a cheque for one hundred pounds, made payable to self or bearer, signed Jabez Hamley in imitation of my usual signature?—that is, did you or did you not commit this forgery?"

Patricia started to her feet.

"Commit a forgery!—No. Are you mad, Mr. Hamley!" she cried.

"Are you?" he answered significantly.

She turned towards her aunt, and holding out one hand, cried "Aunt!" Her voice and attitude meant, "Protect me from this man's insults!"

Mrs. Hamley came forward and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"The child is incapable of such an action," she said.

Patricia threw up her head with its old free gesture and kissed the long, lean hand fervently.

"Thank you, aunty," she said, and looked at Dora.

Dora was looking down, and keeping silence.

"So I think, Lady," said Mr. Hamley with not ungenerous promptness; "your niece does not possess enough knowledge of business to enable her to have played this trick; but she may be the tool of some one else, and I believe she is. I want to get to the bottom of this, and to know whose hands she is in. The person who gave her that cheque must have known it was a forgery."

Slowly the truth began to dawn upon Patricia.

"You say that cheque is a forgery?" she asked, turning her eyes down to the table and speaking to Mr. Hamley without looking at him.

"It is so; a forgery," he answered.

"And any one but myself would have understood this?"

"Any one," said Mr. Hamley emphatically. "I should say that no one well out of the egg-shell but Miss Kemball would not have discovered that fact."

Again she looked at Dora. Her face had a kind of agony in it, but it was firm too. Dora was gazing tenderly at Mrs. Hamley, her soft voice murmuring sympathetically; "Poor dear, how I pity you!"

"But you presented this cheque?" continued Mr. Hamley, after a short pause. "So much you acknowledge?"

Patricia's eyes went back from Dora to the table.

"Yes, I gave that cheque, or one like it: what I gave I never saw," she said.

"You got the money for it, however?"

"Yes; I got a hundred pounds in gold for it." She spoke slowly and distinctly.

Mrs. Hamley withdrew her hand.

"You say you did not see the cheque?" continued Mr. Hamley in the manner of a cross-examination.

"No; it was folded up when I had it, and I gave it to the man folded."

"And you received your hundred pounds in gold?"

"Yes."

"What has become of that sum of money?—a considerable sum of money for a young lady to lift!"

"I cannot say."

"Did you make use of it?"

"No!" she said indignantly. "Do you think it was for myself?"

"Then who had it? who benefited by it?"

"I will not tell you, Mr. Hamley," she answered.

Dora wiped her short upper lip daintily with her embroidered handkerchief, and drew a little sobbing kind of breath.

"Did you hand over the money to the person who gave you the cheque?"

"Yes," she said.

"And you had no idea of its being a forgery?" asked Mr. Wells.

"A forgery!—I? No, indeed; quite the contrary," said Patricia, with energy. "It was given me by a person who said the money was their own." She was ungrammatical by intention. To have said her would have betrayed Dora, his would have been untrue.

"But how came you to be asked to do such a thing? Good heavens! who could have asked you?" cried Mrs. Hamley.

"That I shall not tell," answered the girl. "I promised to keep the secret, and I shall not break my word."

"I think," said Mr. Hamley, with unpleasant but yet kindly pomposity, "if I could convince you, my dear young lady, of the injury this piece of paper has done *me*, you would consider it your duty to deliver up to me the name of the delinquent."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Hamley," Patricia said, not in any manner defiantly, humbly indeed and sorrowfully, yet quite steadily; "but I promised that I would not."

"And if failing your confession, which I have the right to demand, I assume that you are cleverer than your words—that you have concocted this story to account for the forgery—and that you yourself have forged my name, trusting to my respect for my wife, your aunt, not to prosecute you—what then?" asked the master of Abbey Holme loftily.

"I shall have to bear the burden," answered Patricia in a low voice. "I did not know that I was doing wrong, or being mixed up in anything disgraceful. Still, as I promised, I must keep my word whatever happens to me."

"It all seems to me like a dream!" said Mrs. Hamley. "A forged cheque presented by Patricia,

and she owing to it, with some wild story of its having been given to her by some one, and she promising not to tell. It is like a nightmare!" The poor lady put her hand to her forehead. "Can you understand it, Dora?"

"No, dear," said Dora softly.

"You cannot guess at anything to help us?"

There was a kind of anguish in the thin voice that was infinitely tragical.

"No, dear," again answered Dora.

"Let us refer back and see what you were engaged in that day," said Mr. Hamley, turning over the pages of a diary. "Where were you, Miss Kembell, may I ask, on the third of last month?"

"Driving with Dora," answered Patricia.

All eyes turned on Dora, who met their glances innocently; then turned her face towards Patricia, as if listening like the rest to a story she did not understand.

"Driving with Dora," repeated Mr. Hamley.

"Good, to commence with. Driving with Dora! where?"

"To Green Lanes first, and then to Milltown," answered Patricia.

"And at Milltown what may have occurred, pray?"

"I left Dora at Martin's, and went on to the bank for the money" said Patricia quite steadily.



"Dora! do help in this horrible mystery!" said Mrs. Hamley angrily.

Dora raised her eyes and looked at Patricia.

"I cannot," she said. "All I know is that Patricia left me at Martin's, and went up the street by herself. When I asked her where she had been, she said to the bank to change a cheque. Of course I made no further inquiries. I could have no kind of idea that anything was wrong in the affair, and to say the truth I never gave it another thought till this moment."

During this speech Patricia stood like a statue.

She neither moved nor spoke, neither looked nor sighed. She might have been struck to stone for the absolute rigidity of her face and bearing. The whole thing suddenly became clear to her, and she understood for the first time the real nature of the girl she had loved and pitied and put before her as a model to be imitated—if at such a humble distance, yet always loyally.

"But you said you did not know anything about it," said Mrs. Hamley irritably to Dora.

"Nor do I, dear. I know no more than I have said," she answered deprecatingly.

"You should have told us that Patricia went to the bank," said Mrs. Hamley. "A girl of her age

and ignorance should not be suffered to do such things unknown."

"Perhaps I ought—I know I ought," said Dora, coming close to Mrs. Hamley and speaking with caressing humility; "but I thought nothing of the fact at the time, and never once remembered it since. Believe me, dear, the whole thing is as dark to me as to you. I knew and suspected nothing!"

As Dora came nearer to Mrs. Hamley, Patricia drew away. She felt it as an infinite dishonour to seem to canvass for her aunt's good favour while Dora, that false friend, was by her side. She was not willing to put herself in any kind of competition with her: rather, with the passionate self-immolation of the young, she felt, let them suspect her of a crime and praise Dora for her truth and goodness; the consciousness of her innocence was enough for her, let what would else afflict her!

"Well! I do not see that I can do more in this affair," then said Mr. Hamley turning to Mr. Wells. "You will please to forget this household scene, this little domestic drama as I call it; and observe, Wells!—I accept the cheque. There is a mystery about it; but hang me if I can find it out! and I am not a-going to prosecute Mrs. Hamley's niece to get hold of it. Keep a close tongue in your

head of what you have seen if you please ; and now, good morning."

So Mr. Wells bowed himself out, and went from the presence of the great man burdened with a secret of bigger dimensions than he had ever had before.

And when he had gone Patricia's worst time began.

Mrs. Hamley, whose family pride and natural sense of womanly justice were no longer called into action by the presence of a stranger, took her in hand, and dealt with her as severely as she had hitherto been lenient. She seemed to forget that she had just now claimed for her innocence against her husband, and, turning round on her, told her that she had disgraced herself, her father's name, and her uncle's memory ; in any circumstance, and put it as mildly as she would, she was still a disgrace to the family, and a shame to herself. It was her duty to tell. If she had not really done this thing herself, and had been, as she pretended, the dupe of some one else older and more designing, it was still her duty to tell. In keeping it secret she was making herself a party to the fraud ; and was in point of fact as bad as the person, whoever it might be, who initiated this crime.

Mr. Hamley followed on his wife's track by talking largely of his "ward's"—if she would allow

him to give her this appellation—at all events his “guest’s” duty to the state as a citizen, of the obedience due by all citizens to the law whereof he was an unworthy dispenser; and of the consideration due to himself personally, as her host and the husband of her aunt.

To all of which Patricia listened respectfully enough; her dilated eyes filling now and then with tears which never overflowed the lids, wondering when her lecture was to be over; wondering at Dora’s infamy and shame in suffering her to bear all this without coming forward to defend and exonerate her; but, while her intelligence was broad enough to take it all in from their point of view, to see herself as they must see her, clinging to her own higher sense of truth and loyalty, and preferring to bear all rather than betray her trust. Since Dora had spoken as she had done, disclaiming while seeming to explain so far as she could the mystery she herself had created, Patricia had not once looked at her, nor had Dora looked at her; so far the latter knew the grace of shame; and she gave but one unvarying answer to all their threats, their entreaties to tell—“I cannot,” or “I must not.”

Then said Aunt Hamley in a rage,

“I tell you what it is, Patricia—you did it your-

self. It is absurd to think that a girl of your age could have been made such a mere catspaw as you pretend. You knew what you were about, well enough. You forged your uncle's name, or you knew that your accomplice had done so. You stole that ten pounds of mine in the beginning, and now you have gone on in your wickedness till you have done this awful thing!"

"Aunt, don't! don't!" cried Patricia covering her face. Then holding out her hands beseechingly, "Say you don't believe this, aunt! Say it, aunt—dear aunt!—for my dear uncle's sake, for my dead father's sake!"

"Confess, Patricia! If you are in earnest, confess!" said Aunt Hamley's harsh metallic voice.

"I cannot! I must not, aunt! Oh, believe in me! indeed I am innocent! Dora! tell them I am innocent!"

"How can I tell them that?" said Dora, with sincere regret—yes, her regret was sincere enough; but she spoke with meaning all the same, to recal Patricia to herself and the remembrance of her promise. "I believe that you are innocent; in my own mind I feel sure; but how can I tell them positively?"

"Oh, it is hard!" murmured Patricia, as with a

heavy sob she turned away to the window, where she stood looking vacantly at the sunshine lying on the grass and budding trees, thinking how green everything looked, and what a lovely day it was out of doors, and oh! if she could only escape into the freedom and peace of nature once more!

They left her to her own meditations for a moment, and then Mr. Hamley went up to her and took her by the hands in a friendly way enough.

"Better-minded, young lady? will you inform us now and confess all you know about it?" he said.

She looked into his face pathetically.

"I must not!" she sobbed, and hid her face on his shoulder.

"Dear! dear!" said Mr. Hamley, whom the action conciliated, patting her head. "I would give that hundred pounds twice over that this had never happened! Poor young lady! How came you to be such a fool, my dear? I am sorry for you, by George I am! but you are too big a fool to live; you positively are!"

And then he put her away. He did not like to pet her before his wife, and when she had been such a wicked girl too; nor to let Dora feel, as he phrased it, "as if her nose was put out of joint." So he lifted up the miserable face and dropped the

poor nervous hands ; but he sighed and was very sorry, and somewhat ashamed.

"Go to your room, Patricia," then said Mrs. Hamley severely. "Let me never see your face again till you have confessed, either that you have committed this sin yourself, or who is your accomplice. Go, I say. Dora, leave her alone ; she is not fit for you to touch."

For Dora, weeping real tears, frightened and remorseful but not brave enough to own to the truth, had made as if she would have gone nearer to her, caressingly.

Patricia shrank from her visibly.

"Yes, leave me alone," she said in an altered voice.

Her aunt and Mr. Hamley took the change of manner and accent to mean so far a confession of guilt in that she felt the stainless purity of Dora as her punishment ; and it thrilled the poor lady like an electric shock. But Dora, flushing to her temples, drew back—her eyes bent on the ground. She made a beautiful picture at the moment of innocence blushing yet pitiful for guilt ; while Patricia was that guilt, conscious of its own enormity and respecting innocence. So it seemed to the two looking on ; and not an angel from heaven

could just then have shown them the reverse of the shield.

"Good-bye, aunt; you have misjudged me. I am innocent of all knowledge, all offence in this," said Patricia, preparing to leave the room.

"Leave me silently," said Aunt Hamley rising and waving her away. "Do not dare to come into my presence again till you are invited; and consider yourself regarded as a thief—do you hear the word?—as a thief, Patricia, till you have confessed and made restitution."

Without another word Patricia went; and when she had gone Mrs. Hamley's courage of anger gave way, and she fell fainting into a chair.

"That cursed girl! she will be the death of her aunt!" said Mr. Hamley savagely.

Providence might take the old lady in an orderly manner as soon as it liked, but he did not want her to die in a sudden muddled-up way like this. When she went he hoped to have all things done respectably and with befitting state—a doctor in daily attendance and a physician for special consultation; a nurse sent from the best training school in London, and daily inquiries at the house by all the neighbourhood; Mrs. Hamley's health the talk of the place, the topic of the hour. To go off in a fit



of rage because her niece had forged his name to a cheque was by no means the kind of exit he had at heart for his aged lady-wife; wherefore he said again "That cursed girl!" and Dora was too much scared to put in a word of conciliation. Then he looked at Dora and almost whispered, his voice was so soft; "Oh, you best and dearest! what should we do without you!"

"Dear thing!" was Dora's oft-repeated formula as she leant over Mrs. Hamley crying.

"Don't cry, Dora," said Mr. Hamley; but he himself was moved. He had felt deeply the whole affair, and hated the part he felt compelled to play; but he was curiously torn between anger and pity, and scarcely seemed to know his own mind somehow. "She is not worth one of those pretty tears of yours; you are too good to pity her, and yet—heaven forgive me for my weakness!—I am sorry for her too," he continued, turning away his head. "She is a fine young woman, if a trifle rough; and I cannot think how she came to do such a dirty trick, or who could have put her up to it."

"It is all a mystery, and we might as well give it up—it will never be found out," lisped Dora sobbing, as Bignold came hurrying in to attend to her fainting mistress.

## CHAPTER II.

### UNDER HOME ARREST.

THIS then was where her love for Dora, and her loyalty to her promise, had landed Patricia—into actual if innocent complicity with a crime; and with the accusation of having committed that crime herself fully justified by appearances. As she sat in her own room, mournfully trying to understand something of the position in which she found herself, but only more and more bewildered by the contradictions of life and teaching, the old question forced itself once more before her: what was right? She had lived but a few years in this world as yet, and of these few, but a little while in an artificial state of society, yet she had seen enough to know that society and elementary morality are at war together, and that conventional virtue is not the virtue of the law, nor the prophets, nor yet of Christ. She had been taught to revere

truth, loyalty, and uprightness; and she found herself disgraced for her adherence to her old lessons. She saw how Dora had made her place soft and warm by suppleness, untruth, disloyalty; how she was loved and praised through the very sins which she herself had been always taught to hate and shun; how her faults had prospered with her, and how by them she had made herself happy and been the cause of happiness to others. She knew quite well that for her own part she had disturbed the quiet ordering of the Hamleys' home ever since she had come into it; and that her very faithfulness to her sense of right had been a sin and an annoyance.

What then was true, what was right, in this strange world of ours? Christian practice?—surely not! at least in the estimation of Christian professors. Truth and sincerity?—truth and sincerity had alienated her aunt's affection from her from the first, and had finished by landing her here. Constancy, courage, magnanimity, whatever virtue she had learnt in early youth from her uncle—whatever had stood foremost in a good man's simple code—she had proved to be all wrong in practice: and if Dora was right and if Aunt Hamley was right, wise living for men and women means the

practical denial of all the righteous lessons taught the young. And why then, she thought perplexedly, are people taught when young things which the world will not let them practise when grown up? and which if they do practise, they get themselves and others into trouble, and are blamed all round for folly or for fault?

The day wore on with a scarcely conscious passing of time. The girl had not moved from the place where she had first sat down. All her old life passed like a series of pictures before her, and her uncle's words came back as the pages of a closed book which she was reading again. She seemed to almost see him as he had looked and smiled when he lived. She seemed to hear his voice calling to her so cheerily, "Hi there, my love!" with the wind off the sea blowing through his silver hair and freshening the ruddy tinge on his kind face. And Gordon too, how vividly he stood out from the mists of distance in his young man's strength and wholesome beauty, his love, his faithfulness, his courage, his high sense of honour, and his ready submission to the better law of discipline! How she loved him! how she felt to stretch out her hand to him now in her affliction, as if she could have called his spirit to her by the very force of her

yearning, the very need of her love! True, for all these months she had had no word from him; but she did not doubt him. Her letter had miscarried, or his had missed its way. She longed with a child's longing for home and mother to hear from him, to make sure that he lived: that he loved her if he lived she had no need of outward assurance. She knew that; but oh! if she could but hear from him, hold his letter in her hands, and read the words his hand had traced, how comforted she would be! Yet nothing of her longing sprang from or was mixed with doubt or fear. It was only the yearning of love strengthened by loneliness and sorrow.

Amidst all the grief and dismay, the mental perplexity of her state, Patricia had however a strange feeling of freedom. Her body was in prison but her soul felt free. She was as if restored to herself and the past. Banished from the life of Abbey Holme, she had gone back to the old days at Barsands; yet had gone back with a difference. She was no longer the Patricia who had lived like bird in bower, merry, unsuspecting, fearless, and ignorant. She had tasted of the bitter fruit of knowledge since those young days of hers, and no one who has once done that can re-inhabit the old self. Nevertheless she was free; and

gradually, as has been said, her mind warped away from the tangled speculations of her first mood to the loved images, the sweet remembrances of her uncle and Gordon, and her childhood's happy life by the dear old rugged Cornish coast.

So time passed and the hours crept on, but no one came to disturb her. She did not herself know how the day was passing till the evening began to fall; and then, as she had had no food, she began to get hungry. Hitherto the kind of trance in which she had been had stopped all physical consciousness. Now however, she came back to herself and reality, to find herself not at Barsands with her uncle and Gordon, but sitting by the window of her own room at Abbey Holme, with her arms and hands numbed by being so long clasped in each other as they rested on the window-sill, and her neck and forehead stiff from the long lying of her head on them—to find herself, not the loved of old and young, but deserted and in disgrace, a prisoner on parole and a presumed forger.

Aunt Hamley it was who had ordained this penance of the senses. She thought it might have a salutary effect on the proud, rebellious spirit; and she calculated on her girlish fear when Patricia should find herself deserted by the whole family,

and left as if she was no longer one of them. Perhaps that would bring her to her right mind, she thought, and induce her to confess. Had any one suggested to the properly-intentioned lady that she was simply torturing her niece, she would have denied the accusation indignantly. Torture meant the thumb-screw or the bootikins, the rack or the wheel, not merely trying to break down the spirit of a naughty girl by fasting and desertion.

On his side Mr. Hamley would have sent her food, and would have even added a generous glass of wine to help her to bear her disagreeable position better. There was a certain hospitable open-handedness about the man which would have prevented his adding hunger to his punishment of a delinquent, especially if a pretty girl; but Mrs. Hamley was a woman, and small indignities come easier by nature to a woman than to a man—adding pin-pricks to sabre-cut not being out of the feminine line, speaking by majorities.

Patricia, wakened up to herself and her sense of discomfort, nevertheless stayed loyally where she was. True; she was cold and hungry. She had no light, no food; but if she had been left to starve, she would have starved rather than have disobeyed her aunt's command and ventured into the forbidden

quarter of the house. So the hours passed and the evening stole on into night. The stars came out and the moon rose up. She knew that by the reflection on the blank white wall which was her sole window prospect. Then she heard the softly-falling bolts and bars; the sharp double bell summoning the servants to prayers—"and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us," one of the clauses; with perhaps St. Paul's chapter on charity for the reading, or the story of Ananias and Sapphira. After which she heard the rustling of her aunt's rich black silk sweeping majestically through the passage and past her own disgraced door, and Mr. Hamley's lordly step striding after it. And by this she knew that the Abbey Holme household had gone to bed, and that she should see none of them for this night—the servants had evidently been told not to go to her room—and that Dora too had gone to rest peacefully like the others; Dora, quiet, amiable, sympathetic, a little mournful perhaps to suit the sombre mood of the moment, but making the life and charm of the evening as usual, blessing and blessed, and secretly rejoicing in her escape from a disagreeable position at the price of her friend's ruin and on the calculation of her devotion.



And at this thought it seemed to Patricia as if she should die of shame and heartbreak. It seemed to her so infinitely shocking that Dora should have done this wicked thing. The one she had so tenderly loved, had worshipped with all her girlish power of admiration as excelling in womanly loveliness and grace, to have proved herself this treacherous Delilah! Had it been an accident, a chance thing the real issues of which had been unknown to Dora as to herself, she would have borne the burden of it better; but it was the plot, the premeditated cruelty and treachery that seemed to her so frightful, so inconceivably hideous! It was not for herself she was breaking her heart; it was for the destruction of her ideal, the death of her love.

After all this was the tragedy, not her own disaster. Time would repair that; and even if it did not—she was innocent, and no appearances could alter that blessed fact. But time would not restore what had fallen into dust to-day. The graciousness, the love, the beauty, and all that grew out of these in her own heart—all had gone into ruin together! No wonder she felt as if her heart would break. It was a wreck more pitiful than the wreck of the *Mermaid*—a death as real as and almost more sad than the death of her uncle!

Presently the door of her room softly opened and Dora came stealing in. She had coaxed Bignold to bring up some food for the poor prisoner ; which the maid, knowing only that Patricia was in disgrace and thinking it "an awful shame that she should be left to starve like this," was glad enough to do. So Dora stole into her room wrapped as usual in her soft luxurious furs and cashmeres, with her golden hair loose on her shoulders, and her small hands holding a tray laden with good things ; a very fair enchanting picture, but one which had no more fascination for Patricia.

Patricia shook back her falling hair, cleared her dreamy eyes, and rose to her feet. She felt more humiliated to be visited thus by Dora as her good angel than at any other circumstance of this dreadful day.

"Oh, dear, dear child ! how sorry I am for you and for everything ! How cold you must be, and how hungry !" began Dora, setting down the tray and gliding up to Patricia who was standing by the dressing-table. "See dear, I have brought you something to eat ; why, you must be half-starved !"

"I will not eat it," said Patricia, turning aside her head and putting off Dora's hands which she had clasped round her arm.

"Not eat, Patricia!—why not? You have had nothing all day! Are you going to starve yourself to death?"

"I am my aunt's prisoner; I will not eat, nor go out of my room till she allows me to do so," said Patricia. "And, Dora, I do not want you to come and see me," she added. "You come secretly, against aunt's wishes; and I have done with secrets now, once and for all."

"You are cruel!" said Dora beginning to cry.

They were not sham tears—she was really very sorry for the pass to which things had come; but what could she do? Patricia would not be killed; after a little while she would be taken into favour again—as much favour as she could ever receive at Abbey Holme—and all would be forgotten and forgiven. And she, Dora, would do her best to put her well before the authorities, and to give a fine-sounding name to her delinquency. But if she were to tell the truth, what would be the result? Simply ruin! Wise little Dora reflected that Patricia's temporary discomfort was to be preferred to her own everlasting destruction; and if the girl would only be amenable to reason, and like any other sensible creature, her term of trial would be shortened and its bitterness sweetened; and she

might—who knows?—come out as a heroine when all was over.

But Patricia was not like any other sensible creature. She had her own Spartan code which was quite opposed to Dora's favourite worldly wisdom, and she chose to stand by it, hard as it was, rather than be guided into her former friend's softer ways.

"I am not cruel, Dora; but I understand you now—I never did before to-day," she answered; and by the dim light of the little chamber-lamp that Dora had brought in she looked almost heroic in her power and sorrow, her steadfastness and her sternness—like a maid of another race and time.

"You are doing me injustice," said Dora, feebly fencing with her rebuke.

"Can I?" asked Patricia. "After you have led me into a crime by my love for you, by my sympathy with your difficulties, and by your own falsehood, Dora—led me into a crime and left me to such disgrace as this—can I be unjust to you? What can I think of you? and what may I not call you!"

"Hush, Patricia! you frighten me!" said Dora cowering.

"Let your own conscience frighten you, not me; if only it could frighten you into doing the right!"

said Patricia. "How can you live in such a state as you must be in! That is the wonder to me!"

"You are mad, Patricia! how can I act differently?" cried Dora. "Do you want me to be ruined?"

"No, I want you to be saved—to save yourself out of this sea of deception into which you have got. You are being shipwrecked in it, Dora, for time and eternity!"

"I dare not tell!" she said; and then the coward fear that always possessed her came uppermost, and she gasped out piteously; "Are you going to betray me, Patricia? You had better kill me!"

Patricia looked at her with a steadfast, sorrowful, and yet half-scornful pity.

"Can you ask me?" she said. "Do you not know me better than that, Dora? If I were left here to die by inches you need not be afraid of me."

Dora flung herself against her bosom, and threw her arms round her. "You are so good and brave!" she said, sobbing passionately.

But Patricia put her away with resolute quiet strength.

"Don't, Dora! I cannot bear it! I would rather you did not thank me, please; it is too shocking to me," she said in broken sentences.

She could bear her own humiliation better than Dora's—her own wound better than her former friend's craven cowardice.

"Oh, how you hate me!" said Dora half pettishly, half pathetically.

Patricia did not answer. She felt the falseness of this attempt at softening her, and let it pass. The two girls had changed places. It was the adorer who was now the judge, the adored who besought.

"Now, Dora, go; I do not want to see any one, to have anything done for me till my aunt orders it," said Patricia. "I tell you I have washed my hands of all secrets for ever; and if you come in to see me again, though you do it in kindness, I shall tell my aunt. What I know I will keep sacred to the last, but nothing more—nothing new."

"I believe you are mad!" said Dora, rather angrily for all her gratitude and shame and late emotion.

It was a new experience to her to be repulsed, and she did not like it.

"Yes, I am beginning to think that truth and loyalty are looked on as little better than madness by you all here," said Patricia; "but it is a madness I choose rather than the contrary. So good night:

thank you for your good intentions; but I will have nothing."

"And I am to carry this ridiculous tray back again; and it so heavy, and hurts my hands!" said Dora with a helpless look.

"I am sorry I cannot carry it for you, Dora—it is heavy for your little hands," said Patricia sympathetically and in her natural voice and manner.

"I can get round her in time!" thought Dora smiling to herself.

But she calculated on insufficient data. That something which when it once breaks is irreparable, had snapped in Patricia's heart; and her love had died, and was buried in the same grave as her belief and her respect.

So Dora, making a sorrowful face, took back her burden of good food; leaving her door ajar to catch Bignold on her exit from her mistress, to tell her to try her power with Patricia and make her eat something.

But Bignold failed as entirely as herself; though the maid did what the friend had not done—made the prisoner cry like a child. She was brave and strong and steadfast, but she was only a girl yet; only nineteen; and the day had tired her terribly; and most of all Dora and this last scene had shaken

her very soul. And then she was desperately hungry, poor child ; and feeling a little faint and sick for want of food. But she held to her word " Not until aunt allows it ;" and Bignold determined to face her mistress's displeasure to-morrow, should this cruelty continue another twelve hours, and tell her how she had herself tried to induce Miss Kemball to eat something, and how, though she was half-hungered and owed to it, she would have nothing till her dear aunt sent it.

" And if that doesn't touch the old witch nothing will ! " thought Bignold indignantly.

For though Patricia was no great favourite with her—she was too little " the lady " according to the definition of the lady's-maid to be thoroughly liked—yet she was a nice-spoken young person in her way, and at all events a woman.

Bignold had her humanities lying like diamonds in quartz among her professional crotchets ; and just now she thought her mistress the bigger sinner of the two, whatever Miss Kemball's offence had been. To treat a poor motherless creature in this way—Bignold held it heathenish ; and scoffed at the family prayers as possessing any power of good for hearts or lives.

" Better act like a Christian and leave the



prayers and the Bible alone, than bother them all, night and morning, as the old lady did, and behave worse than a heathen the day through," said Bignold to the housekeeper.

She was an impenitent kind of person; one of those who respect good morals but make no account of spirituality. She despised the religion which is made up of strictness in the matter of pious observances, flanked by an unlimited accompaniment of bad temper and uncharitable feeling; and often used to say that she would rather folks did what was right, though they had no "gifts," than talked beautiful and did what was wrong.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE OFFER OF FORGIVENESS.

**K**NOWING nothing of the pitiful little domestic drama, as Mr. Hamley called it, which had just been enacted at Abbey Holme and which was even now going on, Lord Merrian rode up to the house as usual one day during the term of Patricia's home arrest—lengthening now into three weeks. He had been absent from home for nearly a fortnight; on a visit to some friends of his own conventional rank and standing; where he had seen among other charming people a bevy of pretty girls of suitable degree—Ladies Maud and Victoria, Ethel and Ada, girls of good style, well-bred, aristocratic, and of finished training.

But somehow he had not enjoyed himself as of old. At one time he would have been supremely happy in these circumstances. They would have just suited him. He would have talked his fluent

Young England radicalism, while conscious in every fibre of his exalted position, his honourable title, his glittering prospects, as also of the paternal earls and dukes of his fair audience; and he would have lamented the sorrows of the poor and the inequality of society with a pathetic intonation in his sweet voice, while wearing the best fitting coat Poole could turn out, and with the most exquisite little bouquet of choice exotics in his button-hole to be had from the stove-houses. He would have spoken eloquently of the need for some grand crusade against the half-heartedness of the age, and how he longed to see some stirring protest made against our habits of demoralizing luxury, our damning love of pleasure, with our poorer brethren helpless and degraded at our gates; and then he would have gone to the opera and given his guinea for his stall as a young nobleman should, and may be, he would have calculated his distance to a nicety, and taken his hansom cab the "long mile" which means no extra fare. All this was of the nature of the man; a nature of kindly thoughts and a lack of earnest resolves; with good intellectual abilities apt to exhale themselves in words, and the fatal mistake of accepting emotional thought for purposeful endeavour.

And the young ladies—the better gifted among

them at least—would have listened to him sympathetically : and some of them, to whom his fine eyes and distinguished air counted for virtues, would have thought him a consecrated leader of men and one of the future saviours of society. They would not have foreseen him as he would become in a few years' time, a contented, easy-going father of a family, who had sown his wild oats betimes—and those wild oats of principles only, not vices; a portly, good-natured kind of man, thinking the world a jolly kind of place after all for one who had kept his digestion in order and his banker's book well in hand; and as firmly convinced as Mr. Hamley himself, that those were successful who ought to win, and that when men fail it is because they have not the stuff in them to succeed; an hereditary legislator who would look back to his enthusiasm for freedom as a craze honourable to his heart but young, very young; and who when the time came for radical reforms in Parliament would shelter himself behind constitutional policy and the difficulties of statesmanship, for the one part — when the rights of labour were urged by those who laboured on his own land, would put forward his steward and his agent, for the other; who would be

ever and always the Spenlow of good intentions who would, but for that ubiquitous and immovable Jorkins who would not. Alas! that so many bright flames should burn down into such fat darkness as this! that prosperity should prove such a benumbing Circe, and that maturity should so often drop the heroic parable of youth!

As it was however, this visit of his, though he was surrounded by nice girls of his own caste and made much of as the future Earl of Dovedale, did not please Lord Merrian. He found himself incessantly comparing his pretty but colourless audience with the girl whose enthusiasm stirred his own so powerfully, whose sense of truth and wholeness of nature seemed made to be the spur of his weaker and more lagging soul. He had got into the habit of thinking of Patricia as his Egeria. He once spoke of her to Lady Maud as his Egeria; and when Lady Maud asked "Who is Egeria?" he laughed and said, "Was? a nymph;" and would give no farther explanation.

He was really and honestly in love with her; and it was with the best part of him that he loved her. He felt that clearly enough; and as he had at last won the consent of his father, and of his mother the countess too, after a longer struggle—should Mr.

Hamley give the dower for which they stipulated—he had only to be quite sure of himself to take the final plunge.

This visit to the Duke of Burton fixed his convictions. He was in love with Patricia Kemball; no one else delighted him, no one else appealed to him as did she. He would make her the offer of his hand and his life, and he did not anticipate that he should be refused. But before speaking to her he would address himself to Mrs. Hamley. Lord Merrian was a gentleman emphatically, from head to heel; and moreover he was so sure of his game he could afford to deliberate and to do things in good style.

It was then with more than the intention of paying an ordinary morning call that he rode up to Abbey Holme to-day; and with more than ordinary exultation that he saw himself once more in the gorgeous crimson and gold drawing-room of the prosperous owner.

Mrs. Hamley and Miss Drummond were alone. Lord Merrian's eyes looked round in vain for his Egeria: only the tall, thin, pinched, but perfectly lady-like figure of Mrs. Hamley and the gracious presence of pretty Dora met him; but the clear eyes and noble bearing of the woman he loved were not to be seen.

He spoke a few words to Mrs. Hamley, and she was conscious at the first glance, the first sound of his voice, that something more than usual animated him to-day, and that his visit was not merely one of ceremony. He looked half-embarrassed and half-important; and there was a wistful expression about his eyes that seemed to presage confession and emotion. He was almost tender in his manner to her: had not she too something of his darling to glorify her?—and he seemed to forget that Dora Drummond was a young woman, and a pretty one, to whom he had once paid marked attention, in the general family benevolence with which he classed her as part of Patricia, as he had classed Mrs. Hamley.

Was it really true that the grand *coup* for which she would have given a handful of her best remaining days was on the point of accomplishment? thought Mrs. Hamley. Should she live to see her niece Lady Merrian, future Countess of Dovedale, and the mistress of the Quest? How trivial this last little misdemeanour of hers had suddenly become! A child's credulous complicity: a child's mistaken loyalty! She had been punished as a child, but she should be forgiven as a woman. My Lady Merrian might do worse things than present

a forged cheque and refuse to tell for whom, and yet be forgiven !

Presently Lord Merrian asked for Miss Kemball, with a delicate but delicious lingering on the name that was like the softest music to the ears of Mrs. Hamley.

Her pale and peevish face looked up with almost a light on it as she answered : " I am sorry to say the dear girl is not very well, and keeping her room at present."

"Nothing serious?" asked Lord Merrian anxiously.

"No, nothing serious, thank God !—only a cold. Girls," with a ghastly smile, "are always taking cold."

"I hope it is nothing worse," said Lord Merrian uneasily. "She is too precious to all of us to be suffered to fall ill," he added.

"You are very kind, Lord Merrian," Mrs. Hamley answered with a little inclination of her head ; and Dora, knowing that her best policy now was self-effacement, quietly left the room ; and in so doing took credit to herself on Patricia's side, and held herself to have all but atoned for the misdeed which had borne such terrible fruit.

And when she had gone Lord Merrian opened



his case, and formally proposed for Patricia Kemball's hand through her guardian and next of kin, Mrs. Hamley.

To which Mrs. Hamley, carefully concealing her exultation, gave her assent with a certain womanly dignity that struck the young lover as "excellent form," and promised to convey the news to Patricia, who would doubtless be well enough to see him personally to-morrow, when he proposed that he should call again. It was all done with good breeding and good taste; and Mrs. Hamley's share in the transaction showed the fact that the brewer's wife was by no means objectionable, if the brewer himself was. Lord Merrian called himself a Liberal, but he was glad that Patricia—his Patricia—had her aunt's blood and not her aunt's husband's in her veins, and that she, not he, would be his relative by marriage.

The momentous visit then passed off with brilliant but subdued success, and Lord Merrian rode home satisfied if disappointed. Like all weak-willed men, he felt happy now that he had irrevocably committed himself, now that his will had, as it were, the support of external circumstances; but he was desperately sorry he had not seen Patricia. He longed to see her great grey eyes look into his with their

candid love, half frank half shy, and to hear her earnest innocent confession, "Yes, I love you." He had been so much occupied with making up his own mind he never reflected that perhaps he might have missed his way—that perhaps she had only the sister's love for him which would neither satisfy him nor impel her. It had been his own difficulties with which he had struggled—his difficulties of self-certainty and diversity of social position; but he never doubted that his path with her would be smooth enough when he had absolutely defined it and made sure of his own intentions. Handsome young English noblemen scarcely look for obstacles when they condescend to women of an inferior grade. The redundancy of which we hear so much would alone be sufficient to give them confidence; and where the old, the unpersonable, and the mediocre can choose very much as they like, the young, the well-looking, and the highly-placed may surely think themselves secure. Add to this, the respect for rank ingrained in the English character and so ingrained as to be accounted a virtue, and Lord Merrian may stand acquitted of all charge of fopishness if he believed in his success, and took counsel of his love rather than of doubt.

So he rode home disappointed but happy; and while

lamenting the trial of his patience, and that long delay of twenty-four hours before he might hear the dear assurance his whole soul was desiring, he was all aglow with the anticipation of his delight when he should have secured it. How tenderly he would love her when he should have gained her, he thought! What a life of happiness, of mental help, they would have together! It would be no sickly honeymoon of vulgar endearments; it should be a life worthy of a man and woman who had higher objects than those of sensuous pleasure—of a man and woman who would give the world an example of noble living and of moral thoroughness. She should be his Egeria and she would make of him her Numa—prophet, king, and leader of men! Sweet thoughts; bright visions: and the reality that stood like the angel in the way, with drawn sword barring the gates of that fair Eden!

Just now the reality was being transacted with a distinctness that left no margin for mistakes; and in a manner who could have foreseen? thought Mr. Hamley, watching Patricia curiously as a kind of *lusus naturæ*, if indeed she was not one of those only too common whom science and the world call mad.

After Lord Merrian's visit was brought to an end, s. Hamley sent for Mr. Hamley and dear Dora;

to both of whom she detailed what had passed : namely, that Lord Merrian had made a formal proposal for Patricia's hand, and that she had granted him permission to ask the girl herself to-morrow.

"I did right, Mr. Hamley?" she then asked with unwonted meekness.

It pleased her at this supreme moment of success to affect womanly submission and wifely inferiority ; it gave a zest to her triumph, and was the pleasant burden of her golden crown.

"Yes ; you did right, Lady," was Mr. Hamley's reply, made pompously but with condescension.

He had caught her lead and followed it.

"And now, I presume, this poor misguided child may be forgiven?" said Mrs. Hamley. "She has been punished sufficiently for her offence ; not too severely, considering its magnitude, but sufficiently. What do you say Mr. Hamley?"

"Certainly Lady, certainly ; let her be forgiven," said Mr. Hamley. "It would hardly do to keep my Lady Merrian confined to her own room like a naughty child. My Lady Merrian!" he added, rolling the words like a delicate morsel under his tongue. "My wife's niece, my Lady Merrian—the future Countess of Dovedale!"

How he blessed Providence and the old admiral's

wiry constitution that Mrs. Hamley had been graciously pleased to live until now ! Once let this marriage be celebrated, and the poor conjugal moth, having then indeed completed her mission, might fold her wings and leave her work for the kindly hatching of time and good chances.

"Go to her, Dora," said Mrs. Hamley.

And Dora, obedient, rose.

"We must not forget our Dora though, in our pleasure at this great success, this proudest moment of our lives, as I call it," said Mr. Hamley looking at his cousin with a strange expression on his face.

"She is always our first, hey Lady ?"

"Come here, child," said Mrs. Hamley ; and poor Dora, with tears of jealous disappointment in her eyes—they looked beautiful, and like tears of sympathy—knelt down by her cousin's wife.

Mrs. Hamley put her arms round her bended neck and drew her pretty head to her bosom. She smoothed the golden hair, and her lean hand lingered lovingly on the fair round face, while she gazed at her with maternal tenderness. Then she kissed her with what was for her a passionate affection.

"I am glad of this good fortune for Patricia," said in a moved voice. "It is very natural ; own flesh and blood, my brother's child,

and she has no one in the world to look to but myself ; and I may not last long ; but she can never be to me what you are, my little girl—never take the daughter's place that you have filled from the beginning. God bless you, my Dora ! the light of my life, and dearer to me than even my own ! No, we can never forget our Dora even on this or any other day of triumph. And, please God, we shall see such a day some time for her."

"Amen," said Mr. Hamley ; with the unspoken proviso, "I, but not you."

Patricia had now been nearly three weeks under home arrest, and for all this time had seen no one but the housemaid who came to arrange her room. Dora had not appeared again ; and as Mrs. Hamley had ordered a scanty kind of breakfast to be taken to her the next morning, Bignold's advocacy had not been needed ; so, wisely enough, the maid had forborne to intermeddle in a matter where help was not needed, and whence she would be sure to bring away but burnt fingers for her pains. The solitude and confinement, the insufficient food, and the sorrowful thoughts that had possessed her for all this time, had told on Patricia's appearance ; and there would be small difficulty in convincing Lord Merrian to-morrow that she had been, and indeed

was still ill. Looking at her through the lustre of her coming honours Mrs. Hamley was shocked and startled to see how ill ; and more than all she was startled to see how unutterably sad she looked. Was this indeed Patricia, that bright, spontaneous, fearless girl who had come into their quiet life like a whirlwind ; whose very grief for her beloved uncle had been unable to subdue her young energies, and whose breezy activities had reduced the subdued, staid household to general despair ? Not that there was anything drooping or craven about her even now. Her head was carried as straight, her slender figure was as upright, as before ; but all colour had faded from her hollow cheeks ; her eyes were pathetically large and lustrous, and there were dark rings round them that made Mrs. Hamley's heart ache. Her hands too, which had once been so large and strong, were fine now and slender ; and the black dress, which had been cut for the best advantage of her figure, hung in loose folds and creases about her waist and shoulders.

A pang of self-reproach seized Mrs. Hamley. Had she overstepped her duty ? Had she done really what she ought by this unprotected girl ? Could she meet her brothers as a faithful sister should, and pointing back beyond the grave to the charge that

had been assigned her, claim from them, and God, approbation of her work? Still, it would not do to give in. The curse of spiritual pride clung like a weed round the woman's soul. No, it would not do to give in, or to confess by word, deed, or look, that she had been wrong or over hasty.

Not rising from her chair, she held out her hand as Patricia, following Dora, came silently but steadily forward. Patricia went up to her and put her hand in hers. Something in her throat choked her voice so that she could not speak, and even Mrs. Hamley found it difficult to say; "Good morning, Patricia."

"Good morning, young lady. I hope I see you in the enjoyment of good health, though I cannot say you look it," was Mr. Hamley's salutation, made with many flourishes of his hands and some plunges of his well-developed limbs.

But he meant it good-naturedly, and so Patricia took it. It made a little diversion too, and a healthy one. Sentiment and Mr. Hamley did not go together quite harmoniously.

"Good morning, Mr. Hamley," she said naturally; and looked at her aunt, including her.

"Take a chair, Patricia, and sit down quietly," said Mrs. Hamley. "I have sent for you to have some grave talk with you."



Patricia took a chair and sat down.

How large the room looked, she thought, and how bright and full of gold and colour! The mirrors and the gilding and the upholsterer's magnificence all through quite oppressed her. She would have preferred a fisherman's hut or the poorest den of a cottage at this moment to all this showy glitter. Since her banishment up-stairs the present had become dark to her, and she had lived so much in her memories that Barsands and the cottage had become almost more real to her than Abbey Holme; and this grandeur and excess quite pained and dazzled her eyesight. Nevertheless, she sat down quietly, and looked at her aunt, forcing her attention which was loose and a little wandering.

"I have had a most unhappy week, Patricia," began Aunt Hamley clearing her throat. "I may say indeed that we have all had a most unhappy week; and I suppose yours has not been much better?"

"No, I have been very very miserable," said Patricia simply.

"Are you prepared to do what you ought to have done at the first?" asked Mrs. Hamley.

"Do you mean tell for whom I took the cheque,

aunt?" said Patricia after a pause, during which she seemed to be searching back in her memory. "No!" shaking her head.

Her aunt frowned.

"Come now, Lady," said Mr. Hamley, seeing that she had begun on the wrong tack, "shall we not let bygones be bygones, and no more said about it? Let us suppose that your niece has some reason for her obstinacy. It will do us no harm if we suppose that she has some good reason—some what I call valid excuse; and, believing this, let us shake hands all round. There are times and seasons for everything; and the time of forgiveness has come now. Am I right?"

"You are kind, Mr. Hamley; you always are," said his wife. "Well, Patricia, we will do as your uncle has suggested—offer you our forgiveness."

"Thank you, aunt; thank, you Mr. Hamley," said Patricia lifting her eyes.

She did not smile. She took their grace with a certain serious simplicity that was grand in its own way. Even at this moment, when she should have been penetrated with the sinner's contrite gratitude, she bore herself as an innocent person, and expressed neither pleasure nor shame, neither gratitude nor contrition.

"I confess," said Mrs. Hamley a little tartly, "that I am mainly induced to do this through a matter that has occurred to-day."

Patricia gave a quick glance at Dora. Had the truth come out? No; dear Dora was bending over her modern point with her usual placid amiability. Whatever it was that had happened, it surely had not touched her; and Patricia, checking a sigh, turned back to gaze at her aunt again.

"Lord Merrian has been here," said Aunt Hamley; and then she stopped and watched her niece.

"Yes aunt," said Patricia unconcernedly.

She liked Lord Merrian very well, but she was too far down in the depths at this moment to be lifted out of them by the simple intimation of his having called.

"And he has done you the honour," said Mrs. Hamley slowly, "of demanding your hand from me."

"Demanding my hand?" repeated Patricia, who at the first moment did not catch the drift of the phrase. "Does that mean," she then said suddenly, "that he wants to marry me?"

Mrs. Hamley was a little disconcerted at this abrupt method of inquiry; but Mr. Hamley, disposed to see in a favourable light all pertaining to

the young person by whom he was to be related to the family of the Dovedales, rubbed his hands and thought this simplicity delicious. It was so like Patricia; and so far better than humbugging about the bush to go straight ahead and hit the right nail home!

"Yes, it means that Lord Merrian wishes to marry you," said Mrs. Hamley firmly.

"But I do not wish to marry him," said Patricia quite quietly. "I like Lord Merrian very much indeed, but I do not want to marry him."

Mrs. Hamley raised herself up in her chair and looked at her niece. She looked at her curiously, as if she was something odd and wild and strange; and also as if she doubted her senses somehow. Mr. Hamley's jocund smile became a trifle fixed and ghastly; and Dora laid aside her work, and looked at Mrs. Hamley with sympathetic astonishment.

"You do not want to marry Lord Merrian?" slowly repeated Mrs. Hamley.

"No aunt," said Patricia.

By the faces before her she saw that she had again committed one of her usual sins; but, though she was sorry, this was a matter in which she must rouse herself and be firm. Like the forged cheque, it was an affair of life and death, and in-

volved her loyalty to others as well as her truth to herself.

"Not want to marry Lord Merrian?" repeated Mr. Hamley after his wife.

"No," said Patricia in a low voice, but distinctly.

"And why this extraordinary disinclination, may I ask?" said Mrs. Hamley with a polite smile.

"Because I do not love him, I suppose," replied Patricia colouring. "I like him very much, very much indeed; but I do not love him so as to wish to marry him—and," turning pale, "I do love Gordon."

"This is the second time I have heard that person's name," said Mrs. Hamley, still speaking with that dangerous smoothness, that deadly politeness which to those who knew her best was the most formidable weapon of her rather large armoury. "May I be permitted to know who this Mr. Gordon is?"

"Gordon Frere," answered Patricia.

"And who and what is Mr. Gordon Frere, pray?"

"Third lieutenant on board the *Arrois*," answered Patricia.

The name and style were as proud to her mind as

those of Viscount Merrian, son of the Earl of Dove-dale at the Quest.

"And are you engaged to this very promising young gentleman, this third lieutenant on board the *Arrow*?" asked Mrs. Hamley.

"Yes, aunt. Dear uncle, the last night, just before he died, engaged us. But we were always fond of each other—ever since I can remember," she added.

"Now Patricia, this childish folly must come to an end," said Aunt Hamley, suddenly changing her tone to one of severe determination. "I am your guardian and I absolutely refuse my consent. I forbid the whole thing. You are not engaged to Gordon Frere. Do you understand? I have forbidden it; and I have the legal as well as the moral right to do so. You are no more engaged to him than you are to—to whom shall I say?—Mr. Sydney Lowe; and I command you to accept Lord Merrian."

"I am very sorry, aunt, to be always offending you," said Patricia humbly but firmly; "but it is not my fault if I am. As for saying I am not engaged to Gordon, you might as well say that I am not alive. While I am alive I must love him, and only him; and I could no more be false to him, and marry Lord Merrian, than I could betray any

other trust or break any other promise." This she added in a lower voice.

"You hear her, Mr. Hamley!" cried the poor lady, turning with an appealing gesture to her husband.

"I hear her certainly, and I see her," said Mr. Hamley; "and, hang me, if I can make her out. Is she mad, Lady? Have you anything"—he rapped his forehead—"in your family?"

"Why do you call me mad?" said Patricia speaking earnestly. "Is keeping my promise being mad? Is refusing to marry one man when I am engaged to another madness? I think I should be worse than mad if I acted differently—I should be bad."

"And how am I to convey this insult to his lordship?" asked Mrs. Hamley. "How—with what face—can I tell him that a ridiculous little school-girl like yourself has had the audacity to refuse such a magnificent proposal?"

"Lord Merrian would be the first to understand me, and to say that I was right," said Patricia warmly. "Do you think that he, good and clever and noble-hearted as he is, would want a girl to marry him who loved another man, and had promised to be that other man's wife?"

"Why need you tell him anything?" said Mr. Hamley. "Take my advice, my dear young lady," he went on with his soothing voice, "keep your own counsel and we will help you. Do nothing but wipe your mouth and say, 'I will, my lord,' and so bring all your troubles, and ours for you, to a happy conclusion."

"No, Mr. Hamley; you mean well, but I cannot do that," said Patricia. "If I ever see Lord Merrian I shall tell him the exact truth; and I know that he will not blame me."

"And after that what do you propose to yourself?" asked Mrs. Hamley smoothly.

Patricia looked at her aunt.

"I do not know," she said. "I must leave that to you. If you like I will leave the house, or I will live as you are making me live now, or I can go back to Barsands—dear old Barsands!—and live there. I don't care what becomes of me," she said with a heavy sigh, "till Gordon comes home. And then"—a light came into her face as she lifted it up and raised her eyes—"it will be all over, and I shall be in the sunlight again!"

"Now my young lady, hear me," said Mr. Hamley rising, planting his legs wide apart, and with his thumbs in his armholes preparing himself for



an address. "Whatever happens things cannot continue as they are; they are too cursedly uncomfortable. I don't like to feel that Abbey Holme is turned into a jail, and that a fine young woman like yourself is mewed up in her bedroom like a state prisoner. But neither can I have a forger, or at least the associate of a forger, set at loose as one may say in my establishment. So you see where you are—in a cleft stick, unless you get out of it by my lord's help. Marry him, and you shall have the best turn-out that has ever been seen in the county, and I'll give you as handsome a fortune as if you were my own child. There'll be something left for a rainy day and this little one here, after that! I can't say fairer than this. But, by George! if you refuse my lord, you may go hang yourself! I'll not turn you out of my house—you are my wife's niece and the admiral's grand-daughter; but you'll understand that you stay here only on sufferance, as a kind of genteel pauper, a stray dog fed from charity on scraps, a thing too mean and paltry to be kicked out. There, I have said my say, and I'll not say I've made it too hard."

"Go to your room again, Patricia," said Mrs. Hamley severely. "Think of what your uncle has said. He is master here and I cannot act

beyond or against his wishes. Put it clearly before you : Lord Merrian and honour, Lord Merrian and happiness, or this immodest infatuation—for I can call it nothing else—and disgrace. As Lady Merrian all will be forgotten and forgiven ; as Patricia Kemball, with this infamous young man in the distance, you are the companion of a forger and banished from my heart and esteem for ever. Now go ; think of what we have said, and pray God to turn your stubborn heart, and soften your wilful, wicked temper.”

“Dear aunt,” said Patricia rising, “I am sorry to distress you so much, but I am fixed in this. If you kill me for it I cannot say to Lord Merrian that I will marry him ; and I would rather be killed than prove false to Gordon.”

“Go ; leave the room this instant. I will not have Dora’s ears polluted with such immodesty !” cried Aunt Hamley angrily.

And Patricia once more went back to her prison, feeling that surely now the measure of her sufferings was complete.

“Could any one have believed it !” cried Mr. Hamley when she had closed the door and gone. “I tell you Lady she is mad.”

“No more mad than yourself Mr. Hamley,” said

his wife snappishly. "She is simply wicked and wrong-headed. But how to tell Lord Merrian when he calls to-morrow I do not know! What shall I say? What can I do?" She rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair moaning.

"Do not see him at all, dear," said Dora's soft voice. "Let Patricia see him herself."

She did not often make a suggestion, but this was so obvious she could not refrain.

"True; that is it," said Mrs. Hamley. "You are right, dear; always right! Yes, she shall have it to do herself; but oh, I feel that I could just lie down and die for despair!"

"Hard-mouthed young jade!" muttered Mr. Hamley. "To refuse Lord Merrian!—positively to disdain to be made Countess of Dovedale! A mad-house is the only place for her; and if I had my will she should go there. Maybe she'd find her senses then! To decline to be made Countess of Dovedale! Was there ever such a maniac? And all for a third lieutenant in the navy! Good Lord, the world is turning upside down!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE AIR CASTLE.

THE next day was a warm and tender May-day ; a day full of hope and sweet presages of a lovely future ; a day in joyous accord with the gladness and the love that filled the young man's heart as he rode quickly between the blooming hedge-rows, and thought how good a thing it was to live, to love, to be young, and to be loved. No shadow of mistrust dimmed the brilliant sunshine ; no little cloud no bigger than a man's hand foretold the coming storm. As he rode through the lanes humming to himself snatches of *l'Elisir* and *Cenerentola* in a very exuberance of joy, handsome, loving, sure, he looked as if he had conquered once for all doubt and sorrow, those old enemies of man, and had come into the Eden where he would be.

The 'birds sang greetings from the trees as he passed, and the skylark overhead poured down its

shower of melody like an epithalamium to his honour; the meadows, bright with sun and brilliant with flowers, seemed like a royal carpet for his lover's feet; and the crimson twigs of the maple and the hawthorn looked as if they ran with blood that blushed like her fair face. There was no loving simile, no tender conceit that did not flow like music through Lord Merrian's brain as he urged his horse onward, while his thoughts went like messengers before him. His imagination coloured all he saw, attuned all he heard; so that earth and heaven seemed to have come together in his soul, making both one world in which only love and happiness existed and where Patricia Kemball was the queen.

It was the hour and the man; the supreme moment which comes to us all when we have conquered.

So he rode through the lanes and park and avenue, always humming his snatches of song, now passionate and now jubilant, till he drew bridle at the door of Abbey Holme. And then he was ushered obsequiously into the drawing-room.

It was untenanted. Neither Mrs. Hamley nor Miss Drummond occupied each her accustomed place, and there was no Patricia to meet him with her glad shame and bashful love. It chilled him to see

himself face to face with emptiness in the place of welcome. His nerves were so highly strung they vibrated to every influence, and this cold unresponsive room struck the first note of discord.

Presently the door opened and she came in. He went hurriedly forward to meet her, but stopped half-way, and his smile and the sunlight faded out of his face. There was something about her he could not fathom. True, he had heard she was ill, and she looked what he had heard; but there was more than this. There was a depth of sorrow, of strangeness even in her face and manner, that seemed like the beginning of a tragedy, the announcement of a mystery. The strangeness was due partly to the long duration of her home arrest; so that leaving her room, and being free to walk across the hall and through the passages, had almost a bewildering effect on her, making her scarcely know where she was and whether in her old circumstance of union with the family or in her new condition of isolation. Moreover, she was sorry for what she had to say.

It was no blushing bride, yearning if trembling, who came up to her expectant lover prepared to accept as much blessedness as she bestowed; no happy maiden rejoicing in her love and glad that the term of doubt was past, if full of sweetest

tremors at the unknown certainty for which it was exchanged ; but a pale, sad girl in some deep trouble come to give the death-blow to his hopes and his joy. No ; it was no bride who came up to him as he stood shocked and chilled midway between the table and the door, with one hand grasping nervously the back of a chair, the other half held out and half withdrawn.

At the first glance of her large eyes raised to him with such steadfast mournfulness, Lord Merrian read his answer before he made his request. He knew his doom, though he would not acknowledge it to himself ; but went through the formula prescribed, and tempted Providence in the old wild way.

He spoke to her ; but how differently from the manner in which he had anticipated as he rode along the lanes and pictured her shy face with its unspoken confession, which would make his words so few but so eloquent ! Now he had something of the feeling with which a man leads a forlorn hope—a feeling of desperate determination and more resolve than belief—when he told her how much he loved her, and how ardently he desired that she should be his wife.

She listened to him with a downcast air, tender, sorrowful, but not responsive. And when he had

finished and had asked her for the one word which would be the confirmation of his flickering hope, she put her hand into his with a frank kindness that was not love, and said, looking into his face :

“ Dear Lord Merrian, I am very, very sorry, but I cannot marry you.”

It had taken Lord Merrian some little time and thought to be quite sure he loved Patricia Kemball well enough to wish to make her his wife. He had had many doubts and a severe struggle, not only with his parents but also with the more conventional part of himself; but now he felt as if he had determined on this from the first, that she had known it from the first, that she had encouraged him, and that consequently her refusal was cruel and undeserved. And he felt too, that he must break down that refusal at any cost. The prize he had doubted whether he should or should not reach out his hand to take when it stood as he thought within his reach—now that it was denied suddenly became the one thing in his world which he would devote his life to gain. It is the way with men in almost all things; but chiefly their way with women, as the wiser among these last know, and act on.

“ I cannot take that answer,” he pleaded; “ I will not believe that you mean it.”



His handsome face looked with a heart-broken kind of appeal into hers, and her own heart ached to see it. But what could she do? There could be no paltering with truth, no irresolution. She was going to make him as unhappy as she herself was. She was sorry: Heaven knew how sorry! but she could not help it. She must be firm, for his own sake as well as for Gordon's.

For a moment she did not speak; and then Lord Merrian poured out on her a flood of passionate beseeching and more dangerous pleading. He told her how, if she married him, she would help him to be his best self; how she would bring out all his highest nature; how she would strengthen his hands for good, and give meaning and life to his resolves. With her by his side he would live as a man with an ideal should live; and the world would be all the richer and cleaner for the example their lives would afford it—an example rooted in her and her only—due to her and her only. He besought her to reflect on the power of good which she was putting from her; she, whose enthusiasm was for good; whose heart went out to humanity, and whose whole soul was filled with the desire to make men happier and better. Married to her he would devote himself to the sacred cause of

humanity and progress: without her he would be wrecked—a purposeless drifting wreck of all that makes man noblest. Had this no compelling influence with her?

He said all this and more; with scarcely conscious craft taking the line of argument that he thought would have most weight with her; lover-like wanting her on any terms so that he might but have her, and trusting to himself to make those terms all that would best content him in the future.

His words for a moment dazzled her. To be of this great value in life seemed to her such an infinite good! It would be bought by her personal sacrifice; she neither desired to be Lord Merrian's wife nor the possessor of a title. She loved Gordon, and she was a democrat by nature who could never be at home among the aristocracy; but to do good—to be the motive force which impelled a man of Lord Merrian's future place and influence to turn his energies into the right direction—it was a temptation just for a moment, the sophistries natural to enthusiastic youth coming into her mind like voices bidding her to accept this offer as her sacrifice of self carried to the gain of the world.

And then she thought of Gordon; of that last day, and their long life-love; and she felt that to hold

fast by simple integrity was better than to be led away by any false reasoning on the value of sacrifice or the greater gain of complex virtues.

Looking once more into her friend's face, she said ;  
" I cannot indeed, dear Lord Merrian ! How can I when I am engaged ? "

There is no circumstance in life in which a man shows of what stuff he is made so much as when he is in love ; none wherein the difference between a gentleman and a boor is more distinctly proved. That chivalrous obedience to his lady's will, however painful to himself, which marks the gentleman, is just the quality wanting in the boor. The one waits on her desire, the other enforces his own ; the one sues, as for a grace granted by crowned weakness, what the other compels by the force of brute strength. Patricia had judged her friend rightly. He loved her ; more than ever at this moment when he felt that with her was gone all the light of his life, all the hope and glory of his youth ; but he would have scorned to have pressed now for what she so courageously denied. He was a gentleman : and he respected the rights of his rival. Perhaps too a feeling of wounded pride helped to stiffen his shoulders to bear their burden with the quiet dignity of a true man. He, Lord Merrian, knowing

his full value, knew that socially he was far ahead of a nameless third lieutenant in the navy without family or money. Man for man too he did not fear any comparison that could be made between him and any one else. He knew how he stood there ; with what good gifts nature had endowed him when she sent him into the world a nineteenth-century Antinous ; so that even on this lower personal ground he was aware that he stood too high for any possible humiliation.

"I have no more to say," he said after a long pause, during which he had stood holding her hand in his ; "you have been frank and true, like yourself. I cannot, even for my own happiness, urge you to act against your feelings or your principles. If it was only a case of waiting I would wait for you as long as Jacob waited for Rachel!—I would wait years on years till you took pity on me and said come ! Is there no hope of this ?"

He bent down and looked into her face.

She shook her head.

"While Gordon lives I could love no one else," she answered simply and gravely ; "and if he died I think I should die too ! He is all that is left to me now of my only real life ; for this life is not mine, and not real."

"You seal my lips," said Lord Merrian turning away; "and you have broken my heart!"

She stood up by him and laid her hands on his arm.

"No! no!" she said; "you will find some one of your own class who will be better fitted for you than I am: and we shall always be friends. Shall we not?—brother and sister together?"

He smiled in the sorrowful way in which men do smile when they are offered this pale comfort of fraternity where they had looked for the warmth of a life-long love.

"Yes," he said in a broken voice; "we will be friends always."

Her hands lay heavily on his arm. He unclasped them gently; kissed them as if he was standing by a death-bed and this was the last leave-taking; and then murmuring some indistinct words that sounded something between a farewell and a blessing, he left the room hastily; and soon after Patricia heard the sound of his horse's feet thundering down the drive.

She did not know exactly how the next few moments passed. She remembered nothing but an aching at her heart and a sense of confusion in her brain. She scarcely knew where she was, nor what

had happened, nor what was to come, but sat with her eyes fixed on the carpet, not thinking, only feeling.

“Have you seen his lordship?”

It was Mr. Hamley who said this, as he and Mrs. Hamley stood before her. They had come into the room in the noiseless way characteristic of Abbey Holme, and she had not heard them till the unctuous voice of her aunt’s husband broke the silence and her reverie together.

She looked up and pushed back the hair from her forehead. She had a bewildered and startled expression that seemed almost to justify Mr. Hamley’s supposition of latent madness.

“What did you say?” she asked, looking from one to the other.

“Have you seen his lordship—Lord Merrian,” repeated Mr. Hamley, pronouncing the words very distinctly as when one speaks to a foreigner or a deaf person, a child or an idiot.

“Yes,” said Patricia fetching a deep breath.

“And what have you told him?” asked her aunt.

In spite of herself the poor lady trembled. There was just a glimmer of hope left alight.

“I told him that I could not marry him because I was engaged, and loved some one else,” said Patricia.

"And he accepted this excuse?" said Mrs. Hamley in that dangerously smooth voice of hers. She had better have spoken roughly, so far as Patricia was concerned.

"He thought of course that I was right, and went away," Patricia answered. "We are friends," she added anxiously, as if to reassure them; "we shall always be friends."

Husband and wife looked at each other. Mr. Hamley beat the devil's tattoo on his chest, and softly whistled a few notes of the "Ten little niggers." Mrs. Hamley's bitterness of disappointment exhaled itself in a few angry tears, which she concealed in the best way she could, under cover of a sudden cold.

"Well Patricia," then began Mrs. Hamley, "you are so far your own mistress as to be allowed the liberty of rejection. I cannot force you to marry Lord Merrian, or any one else, how much so ever I should like to do so, foreseeing your future, and judging for your good. But if you choose to decline such a chance, you must. All I can say is, that I wash my hands of you now and for ever. I do not know what your uncle's designs for you may be. He is a kind man, but a just one too; whatever he proposes, to that I shall assent.

If he says that you are to be turned out into the streets to starve, you must go. I cannot plead for you. And if he says that you are to live here as you are living now, in solitary confinement till you are twenty-one, you must do it. He is the master, and you yourself have tied my hands."

Mr. Hamley came forward.

"I said last night if I remember correctly," he began oratorically, "that I would neither turn you out of my house nor prosecute you for the crime which you have been guilty of as principal or accessory; nor yet maintain you a prisoner in your own room. You are my wife's niece, the grand-daughter of an admiral and a K.C.B., and though about the biggest fool for a young lady with all her senses that I have ever met with, still a young lady as I feel bound by family circumstances to look after so far. You are free to remain here as long as you like. I do not grudge you your diet; it won't break me; no more will an occasional new gown or bonnet when absolutely required; but, like your aunt, I have done with you. I take no more interest in you. I don't care a hang what you do or what becomes of you, so long as you don't disgrace this house. You are as free as a bird for me; for I would as soon give myself the trouble of poking after the sparrows



in the hedge, and seeing what they are a-doing of in the mornings, as give myself the trouble of regarding you. You are wiped off the slate—done with. And now you know where you are ; so make the most of what is left you, for it's precious little I tell you ! ”

“ I scarcely understand what you both mean or how I am meant to live here,” said Patricia, looking vaguely from face to face of the two stern judges who stood before her and condemned her. “ Do you ever mean to speak to me, aunt ? am I a prisoner ? or what ? ”

“ You are free, Patricia,” replied Mrs. Hamley. “ What you have desired you now possess. You will live with us apparently as usual. Mr. Hamley is not one to wish our private affairs to be made public property, nor do I desire to create a scandal. The world shall see no difference.”

“ Only I shall know it ? ” she asked.

“ Only you shall know it,” repeated her aunt grimly. “ You will not be punished, and you shall have enough to eat, and be occasionally seen out with us to keep up appearances. But you will understand that all my love for you has gone, all my care ; and that, as your uncle says, you are as free as a bird in the air because of no more conse-

quence. You have an asylum here, not a home. You will soon know the difference, and be better able to estimate the worth of what, in your wicked folly, you have thrown away."

"But I cannot live like this!" cried Patricia a little wildly.

Aunt Hamley smiled and spread out her hands.

"It has been your own doing!" she said.

"Aunt! dear! what would you have me do? —marry Lord Merrian while I am engaged to Gordon? Could you counsel any girl to so base a thing!" she cried, with something of her old energetic sense of right, something of her old directness and abhorrence of crooked dealings breaking out through the maze and the deadness, the strange confusion and oppression of her present state.

"We will not go over the old ground again, if you please," said Mrs. Hamley frostily. "We discussed that last night. A theme becomes tiresome when continually repeated."

Patricia put her hand up to her head, and the fire burnt itself out of her eyes and brain.

"I seem to be in some horrible dream," she said wearily. "My whole life has been a dream since that night!"

She sat down on the sofa with a heavy dazed look,

but neither Mr. nor Mrs. Hamley was in the mood for pity. Nothing short of the absolute agony of death would have softened them at this moment. They were too sorry for themselves to be able to be sorry for her.

"If you are not well, Patricia, you had better go up-stairs," said Mrs. Hamley coldly. "The drawing-room is not the place for a girl's hysterics."

"Uncle!" cried Patricia holding out her hands and looking up.

It was to the dead she called; but Mr. Hamley took it to himself, albeit she never called him uncle, and always made an internal protest when her aunt so spoke of him.

"Poor young woman; we must not drive her too hard, hey Lady?" he said, taking both her burning hands in his.

He was a man with his soft places; women found them out though he was a good husband. Pleased vanity and a pretty woman together found those places very soft.

"Come come, rouse up!" he said, patting her hands; "we can't have you go on like this, you know! You have disappointed and injured us, but you shan't come to harm. Look about you and pull yourself together; this kind of thing won't do, you

know. Water, Lady ! get some water ! By George, she is going to faint ! ”

“ Don’t make a fuss with her, Mr. Hamley,” said his wife ; “ it is the worst thing in the world for hysterics. Lay her down and open the window. She is just a little overcome ; and no wonder ; but there is not much the matter with her. Girls are always fainting when things go wrong with them.”

But Patricia did not faint, or as people call it, “ go off.” She was only benumbed and overwrought ; and after a few deep sighs and bewildered movements, she came to herself again, and painfully staggered to her feet.

“ There ! sit where you are till you are fit to walk straight instead of staggering about as if you had I don’t know what,” said Mrs. Hamley peevishly ; “ and here are my salts. How silly you are to go on like this, Patricia ! ”

“ Now you know a little of what we feel,” said Mr. Hamley with a rather hazy idea of sequential reasoning, as he sat down by her on the sofa and fanned her with his wife’s large French fan, telling her all the while how wicked she had been, and how bitterly he had been disappointed in her, and how she had cut her own throat and no one could help her now the deed was done ; with more to the same

purpose ; Patricia hearing his voice as a far off kind of mill stream which sounded but did not convey much meaning. But though he lectured and talked big words—big words and bad grammar—he did not speak unkindly. That pathetic cry of “Uncle” had touched him ; and he was disposed to regard this recalcitrant sinner with something like human kindness ; which to him seemed extraordinary generosity.

For the matter of that however, both Mr. and Mrs. Hamley felt that they were wonderfully generous all things considered, and that they were doing their duty with heroic magnanimity towards one in no way worthy ; more than their duty indeed, and far beyond what could possibly have been expected of them.

So they were, judging by their own lights and from their own stand-point. To forgive so far as not to prosecute her for a forgery in which she had been confessedly an accessory, as Mr. Hamley said, and then to forgive, so far as not to banish her from the house, the severest social disappointment she could have inflicted on them—in both these acts they were generous ; and they glowed with the conscious satisfaction of the virtuous as they reflected on their good deeds.

What an outsider might have said was another

matter. Could rough old mother Jose, or even prim Miss Pritchard, or any one of the simple fisher-folk who had known Patricia in her Barsands days have seen her now, her health and mind breaking down under the iron despotism of her aunt's rule—that unloving, cold, and contradictory rule which allowed no freedom, no expansion, no power of growth to youth or character—what would they have said? Something very different from Mr. and Mrs. Hamley's concluding talk that night, when he threw out as a fine fly to which she was expected to rise; “I think, Lady, no one after to-day can say I am a hard man or an unjust one?” and she had answered; “No, Mr. Hamley, you have been more patient than I dared to anticipate. We have both acted as Christians, I hope; which must be our consolation and support!”

## CHAPTER V.

### ADDED TO THE ESTATE.

NEVER had life been so prosperous with James Garth. That twelve hundred pounds had surely carried a blessing with it! It had fructified in his hands so that it had done him the good of twice its amount, and had mended the grievous rent which ill-luck and an evil inheritance had made in his affairs as if the stitches would never give way, and all was as good as new. It was a pleasure to see him with his honest face beaming with satisfaction, and his step as light as his heart, when he set out on his day's work; and how he held his head high and seemed to congratulate himself on his state as one that could not be bettered, as he passed from field to fence and from yard to fold. And yet how sad it was to those who knew that his prosperity had no more root than a cut flower blooming in a vase, and that he was virtually Mr. Hamley's serf,

held on during the great man's pleasure, to watch his exultant satisfaction and childlike forgetfulness that nothing of all this was really his own since the day when he had accepted Simpson's loan.

Still he had used the money well ; and for a rootless thing it all looked clean and vigorous. Not a penny had been wasted. He had paid up all his creditors, save the most dangerous, the man who had consolidated his debts into this one huge millstone ; replenished his small farm stock which had dwindled into a mere nothing, worse than none at all ; set up his children in boots and his wife in crockery and house gear ; got one or two loads of "strengthening" for the land, and hired labour for a bit of fence-work here and a yard or two of drainage there. Yes, he had used the money well, and had made every pound of it pay. But he had used it. And of the loan not more was left than thirty pounds to meet the first half year's interest. But he calculated on a tidy little sum for the small croft of hay that would be ready for cutting in another three weeks or so, and the crops looked well so far.

To be sure every now and then flashes of an odd kind of doubt came into his mind ; but a doubt perfectly unreasonable, and, as he would try to



convince himself, ungrateful as well. But he could not quite get rid of it. The fact was he had never really liked Mr. Simpson ; though he was the poor man's lawyer thereabouts ; a man who took up land and legacy cases, and suits for lapsed rights on speculation and the terms of no gain no pay, but if success then half the amount fought for and obtained. It was a bold way of doing business that sometimes succeeded when the law of the case was too strong to be set aside by technicalities, but that as often failed ; the longest purse making the best fight of it in the law courts as elsewhere, and, whatever may be said about justice being no respecter of persons, the peasant rarely getting the better of the gentleman. In spite however of this professional class-philanthropy, and in spite of his unconditional loan which had such a look of off-handed generosity with it, Mr. Simpson was, as has been said, no favourite with James Garth ; and he looked anxiously to the time when he should be able to pay off his debt and be a free man once more. He recognised the lawyer's trust and kindness and all that, he said ; but he preferred to be his own man and to owe nobody anything.

As he sat in the kitchen one evening painfully making calculations and adding up sums on dirty

scraps of paper, for head-work was not much in James Garth's line, he made it clear to himself that, with such and such a profit on the hay and the barley and the handful of wheat in the angle, the patch of roots, the calf, and the litter of thirteen born that very day—as fine young pigs as could be seen in a day's walk ; thirteen ; not one missing or moided, and of which Mrs. Garth, like a true farmer's wife, was as proud as if they had been her own children and about as anxious that they should be done well by—with all this in hand, he made it clear to himself that he should be able to pay off so much of the loan by the back-end of the year. It was a fair-looking calculation, as comforting as Alnaschar's, and as real. For though the figures stood well, and proved like a sum-book, yet, granting them true as they stood, at the best nothing had been allowed for a bad season and spoilt crops, and the margin, say for sickness or extra expenditure of any kind not tabulated, was merely *x*, no more. It was just the kind of bright-looking bubble which hope and a sanguine temperament fashion between them, the momentary will o' the wisp which fortune in her crueller moods flings out to mislead men before she destroys them.

: This was emphatically true of James Garth and

his prosperous future ; for while he was sitting at home, putting down his rows of exact but obedient figures and beguiling the evening with pleasant but fallacious *q. e. d.*'s., Mr. Hamley's last words were ringing in Mr. Simpson's ear ; "Call in the loan at once. No humbug, no delay. Down on the nail it went and down on the nail it must come back. Send up a man to-night ; twenty-four hours ; not a minute more ; and d'ye hear ? sharp's the word."

The blow fell hard and heavy. It came unexpectedly and it came cruelly. When everything looked so well, everything promised so fair, it was hard to have the whole fabric shattered for a rich man's greed—the possibility of success that was so probable destroyed for a stronger man's selfish will ! Perhaps it was extrinsically better that the acres owned by James Garth should be taken by Mr. Hamley who would farm them more completely than that other could. But it was a life's ruin all the same ; and some one once said that the life was more than meat and the body than raiment. But these are old-fashioned words, which the world has gone a long way past in this nineteenth century of ours !

Still, economically right as it might be, the thing

seemed a pity all the same. Even the clerk who brought the notice was sorry for the errand on which he had come. The place looked so clean and bright as he came in out of the soft May evening twilight! There were such pleasant evidences of homely sufficiency in rack and shelf and dresser; in the cheerful little handful of fire crackling on the hearth for the boiling of the supper pot hanging from the chimney crook; in the tidy clothes of man and wife, and the contented faces of both as they turned their eyes to the door when it opened and bade the visitor step in and come to the light and the fire.

The man, Simpson's clerk, was the son of a peasant himself. He knew the signs, and he felt for one of his own kind; as was but natural. Moreover he hated Mr. Hamley whom he feared, and had no more love for Mr. Simpson whom he despised. He would rather it had fallen to any one else, he said, to do this thing; but he was hired for Simpson's work; and subordinates cannot afford to keep either feelings or a conscience. The great food question is king over all others, and poverty makes its victims of soul as ruthlessly as Jaganâth of bodies.

There were no loud words, no swearing, no exclamation even when James Garth opened the letter

and read the notice. He took it with absolute calmness. It might have been a mere circular telling him the upset market price of beasts, or a notice of a sale to be held to-morrow in Milltown, for the quietness with which he received it. He only flushed a fiery red for a moment, the veins in his neck and forehead suddenly starting like cords; and then he paled to a dead white which left his face like that of a corpse, as the whole thing suddenly revealed itself. He had walked straight into the snare that had been laid for him, and there was no way of escape, look where he would. The twelve hundred pounds required of him before twenty-four hours were come and gone, and Mr. Simpson confessing that the money was not his own but Mr. Hamley's, and that all entreaties for time would be just so much labour lost—why the thing was self-evident! He had been entrapped; and Simpson had simply been Jabez Hamley's tool and decoy.

It was neatly done. Cruelty of the worst kind always is neat. Mr. Hamley had never done anything with nicer precision or more heartless inhumanity. He had marked his game, covered him, and now had him safe; as safe as if Long Field Farm was already mapped out on the estate plan of Abbey

Holme, and the old title-deeds of the Garths locked up in the fireproof safe let into the walls of the "Growlery." Yes, it was neatly done. No one could have shown more patience in stalking his prey, thought Mr. Hamley rubbing his hands; and now he had the reward of patience. A grand quality! To know when to hold and when to strike—is not half the meaning of success to be found herein?

While he thus congratulated himself on his method and held himself to have deserved well of men and the science of agriculture, as practised in the country round about Milltown, James Garth sat in the house which was substantially no longer his own, conning that text which had been assigned to him out of the popular lesson of the day—the weaker man must lose, and *Might is Right*.

"It is not only that I want the land for personal purposes—I could have disappointed myself easy enough if that had been all," said Mr. Hamley to Mr. Borrodaile, getting the first word with the rector, knowing there would be more words than one on the transaction when it became known, and anxious to make himself appear a public benefactor in his private dealings; "though I don't deny it will fit in very well with the rest—no gentleman

likes to have a bit here and a bit there among his own that ain't his own; but when it comes to a bit of weed-ground, as this Long Field is, why it's a disgrace to the neighbourhood, and a nuisance too, to every gentleman as desires to keep his land in good condition. Thistles and dandelions—that's about the size of it. And who wants to have his fields stocked with them, I should like to know? Not for as many James Garths!"

To which the rector said—no, certainly not; no man spends his money on guano and top-dressing, to have his careless neighbours ruin his labours; and if James Garth could not farm the land properly it had better pass into the hands of one who could and would.

Unfortunately it happened that at this moment both Dr. and Miss Fletcher were from home, else may be James, knowing how good they were to their poorer brothers, might have gone down to them with his row of figures and his story. But they were away in London; and time was too short for letters to pass between. Had not Mr. Hamley foreseen all this, and had he not waited until "yon hound Fletcher" was clear off the premises for a few days? A child of the generation as he was he would have scorned to have committed the blunder

of leaving the back door open. No ; he had James safe in the toils, and in Dr. Fletcher's absence there was neither man nor mouse in Milltown who could gnaw the cords asunder. So the fiat went forth, and Long Field Farm was sold to Mr. Hamley, standing crops, house, stock, land ; and Garth had a full hundred more than if any other man had bought the lot. Mr. Hamley wanted to have it said that he had done the thing handsomely. And he did it handsomely too, according to his code ; leaving the dispossessed farmer with a clear hundred in hand, when all expenses were paid and the whole thing ruled straight between them.

Garth was strongly urged by his friends to go abroad with this sum, and try his fortune in Australia or America. He let men talk ; and either did not answer at all, or, when their words roused him, bade them shut up with an oath, and a savage look not like his old self. But then he was not like his old self any how. He might have been another person altogether. The James Garth men had known these five and forty years and more, active, industrious, hopeful, cheerful, had died and left the mere shell as his representative. He did nothing, would do nothing ; and while food was set before him, and he had a place where he



could creep like a dog to sleep in when he came home, he neither cared nor knew what was behind. The present and the future were alike swallowed up in the vanished past, and he lived only in regret and remembrance.

His sorrow had broken him down, and had turned him, if not to absolute madness, yet to something that was very near it. People looked after him and shook their heads when they met him; and little children, who had always loved him, shrank from him in fear. Unshaven and neglected, and though his clothes were whole yet leaving on you the impression of rags and sordid misery, he wandered about the Long Field lanes, never speaking even to his oldest friends beyond a hurried good day; or may be it was only a sullen nod that he flung with a slouching air and a downcast, side-long glance. Never resting, never working; muttering to himself; sometimes to be heard laughing wildly and sometimes with his face buried in his crossed arms weeping just as wildly; or standing by one of the Long Field gates looking with burning eyes and blackened lips on to the land that the master of Abbey Holme was breaking up into harmony with his own—and he a trespasser on the ground where he and his forefathers had been

owners; not drinking, but having so much the look of it in his unsteady gait and confused air that even his friends held he must "get it on the quiet," and all thought he was never better than half sober at the best; this was how he lived and looked from the hour when Simpson's clerk brought up that notice, and he knew that he had been tricked and sold.

But there was nothing bad about him, poor fellow! neither was he mad; no more at least than any other heart-broken creature is mad. The world called him so for want of a finer distinction, and it answered Mr. Hamley's purpose to set the report well afloat. It prevented too much sympathy for his victim. We do not feel real sympathy for mad folks. We are theoretically sorry for them and express ourselves shocked; and if we can bring it out clearly why they have gone mad, and make a well-rounded domestic history of cause and effect, we are satisfied. All the same, we keep away from them; and our precious balms would be of the kind to break their heads if we administered them. At the best too, we think it deplorably weak that they should have lost their wits for sorrow. When half Milltown said James Garth had gone out of his mind because he had lost his land, the other half, which listened, thought he was showing a contu-

macious and undisciplined spirit which deserved less pity than reprobation. Man is born to sorrow, and he should take his inheritance patiently. Besides, it must be so very unpleasant for poor Mr. Hamley, they said. He had put money on the estate, and of course he had a right to have either his loan or his land. He had behaved nobly to the poor fellow; and see what an improvement it would be to all that bit of the road when the farmhouse and its pigsties and dirty old sheds were all taken down and carted away, and those ill-kept fields in as good order as a garden! So far from blaming him they thought he had done both well and wisely; and they were only sorry for him that his good work had wrought such havoc with that half-witted fellow. For he could never have been worth much if his mind had given way at the first little trial like this; and it was not a nice thing for poor Mr. Hamley to feel that he had been the cause of such an awful upset.

Mr. Hamley represented society, success, and the law. To a law-abiding people legality is a tremendous backstay, and sanity and success are so much more pleasant to contemplate than insanity and ruin! Besides, take it how you will, it was better for the world at large that Long Field should

be owned by a capitalist who could farm it up to its capabilities, rather than by a peasant proprietor who, doing the best by it he could, grew more weeds than worts and took less off than he put in.

All this good economic reasoning, however, did not mend matters for poor James Garth. But what did it signify? Between the more symmetrical rounding of a rich man's property, and a peasant's holding on to the land of his fathers, who would hesitate which is the better thing to see? And if the dispossessed break their hearts or lose their heads for grief, they but confess their own weakness thereby. The stronger must take the crown of the causeway as his right, and the weaker must go to the wall as his sorrow. The law of nature has crystallised this fact ever since the first wolf eat the first lamb; and there are those who deny any difference between men and wolves—with lambs.

Mr. Hamley and James Garth represented the righteous supremacy of strength, and the inevitable overthrow of weakness, and only a few washy enthusiasts on the one hand, and godless democrats on the other, would maunder about a law of duty imperative on the rich and strong, or uphold the doctrine of rights on the side of the poor and weak. It was an insignificant little transaction save to the

persons immediately interested ; but it was a type ; and for the occasion Long Field Farm was as a microcosm where the tremendous facts of the universe were being transacted unhelped or unhindered by the love or good conscience of men.

The Garths had moved into lodgings in Milltown. This of itself was a change of no mean magnitude. The farmhouse freedom and rough plenty that had made part of the rule of life at Long Field, the ceaseless activity, the interest in work never ending and always changing, the open-air life for man and boy and child were all gone now—exchanged for cramped lodgings in a confined back street smelling of stale fish and foul sewers, in the heart of a town. For though Milltown was nothing but a large-sized village to those accustomed to metropolitan centres, it was like a metropolis, a closely-packed human ant-hill, for these poor folks, accustomed as they had been to the breezy uplands and the unconfined air of moor and meadow.

Mrs. Garth, good soul, battled with all these untoward circumstances bravely. When women are brave they make a divine fight of it, and when men give way the collapse is generally complete. The wife however, was so much better off than her husband in that she had her children to think of, the

place to keep tidy and appearances to maintain. Her motherhood and housewifery remained the same now as at the farm, but his occupation was gone. And then again, though she had loved the place well it had never been to her all that it was to James. She was a woman of strong instincts and keen affections as well as of sound good sense, but she wanted just that dash of sentiment which had expressed itself in him in the pride of family proprietorship. If he would have put his shoulder to the wheel and have gone out to one of the colonies with the money he had in hand, she would have been quite as well pleased, had they prospered and the children kept their health, as if they had kept Long Field. This does not say that she did not grieve for the loss of the farm, or that she failed in tenderness or sympathy, only that she had more objects of interest left to her than he had, and less sentiment to make her suffer. Still she did make the best fight of it incomparably; and when people saw the difference between them they said she was doing her duty like a Christian, but as for James, the wreck he had made was disgraceful, and the way he let things go by the board a shame.

All these things were remembered in the days to come when a motive had to be found for a deed that

thrilled society at Milltown as it had never been thrilled before; and a theory had to be constructed that would fit the facts for the one part and hold together for the other. It was then found how much a man may damage himself by not taking his inheritance of sorrow cheerfully, and what evil results may follow on not acknowledging the divinity of that law of the strongest by which the weaker is destroyed.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE CLEFT STICK.

IF Mr. Hamley had come down on James Garth, he was so far impartial in his dealings with man and man as to come down on Colonel Lowe as well. He had to make it evident to Milltown that he, Ledbury's office-boy, had bought up one of the local aristoi, a "swell" who had married Lady Anne Grahame's daughter;—and bought him up as easily as he had covered a poor paltry peasant. Besides, he had that need of action which comes after a disappointment; and, failing marriage and Lord Merrian, turned to Cragfoot and revenge. So it came that Colonel Lowe, being far behind-hand with his quarterly interest, received a notice from Mr. Simpson—all due legal forms being complied with—that his client who had lent the money had given notice to foreclose. Unless then, he could find some one else to take up the mortgage, his bad quarter of an



hour was at hand, and his turn at the Hamley grindstone had come round.

Six months wherein to settle his affairs—six months wherein to find another capitalist who would lend sixty thousand pounds on a decaying property, with the quarterly interest always in arrears and getting yearly more difficult to find. It was a bad look-out for the Colonel; but to do him justice he faced the gloomy prospect manfully, and gave way to no weakness of hopeful gilding by which folks so often make bad appear good and present ruin look like future fortune. He only cursed his evil stars, and that fatal luck of his which had landed him in this hole. Had any of the thousand and one fortunate probabilities come off which never do come off for the gain of amateur gamblers, or any of the unfortunate accidents not happened which always do happen to overwhelm those who are tempted to their destruction on the Turf, the Colonel would have stood to win ever so many hatfulls. But all his bets turned the wrong way; and instead of bringing himself home, as he had hoped, he had plunged heavily—each time more heavily than the last—losing with a persistency of miscalculation that should have warned him had he been of the kind to accept warnings, and that as it was looked like Nemesis.

The upshot of it however was, that he stood now on the very verge of ruin, with only one chance left—Sydney's marriage with Julia Manley and her hundred thousand pounds.

If the boy would not marry her—and he had not made a move that way—they were all done for; but his father had not kept him about him all his life not to know something of his nature; not to know, above all, that poverty was just the thing Syd would not accept, let what would be the means by which he would creep out of the net, and that when the fix came he would get money somehow, by any act of treachery or dishonour compatible with his position as a gentleman. He had no fear of the result when affairs pressed seriously; and the day after he received the notice he resolved to make a final appeal to his son's good sense and right feeling, and having done this to abide the issue—of which he had no doubt. Once convinced that his only course, as a man and a gentleman, was to marry a woman utterly distasteful to him in every sense but that of a convenient banking account—and the thing was done. To be sure, he was hard to convince; but then he was young; and young men are self-willed at times and the elder and wiser must have patience.

Colonel Lowe had never himself shown to greater advantage than he did to-day, when, for the second time, he went thoroughly into his affairs with his son, and placed the whole condition of things clearly before him. Nothing could exceed the delicacy with which he stated the only chance of escape left them, unless it was his manly frankness, his paternal tenderness. Sydney was selfish, insolent, ill-tempered, weak—had a thousand faults for one virtue; but he did really love his father, and the difficulties of his own position were increased by the desire he honestly had to help the Colonel, and set him free from his embarrassments. Had he not been Dora's husband he would have been Julia Manley's within the month; but what could he do? He was in a cleft stick, and there was only one move which could free him. And that one move—would Dora consent to it? Before he compromised himself here he must be quite sure there. He believed that she would release him; for she loved poverty no better than himself; but until he was assured he must fence off a promise, and fall back on his personal reluctance as his safest card to play. He thought he could compel her; he felt convinced he could when he had once made up his own mind, just as his father felt convinced about himself; but between love and

doubt, that vacillating mind of his was not made up as yet, but was tossed like a football now by his affection for his father, now by his hatred of poverty, now by love for Dora, then by doubt of her acquiescence, and then by his repugnance to the alternative.

"I loathe the woman!" he said passionately. "Of all the women I know Miss Manley is the most detestable in my eyes."

"Poor Julia!" said his father. "She is no beauty I confess; but she is very amiable, and she has a hundred thousand pounds at her disposal."

"It is frightful," said Sydney covering his face. "But I will think of it. I can say no more. If I can I will; but the sacrifice is maddening!"

"I only ask you to think of it, my dear boy," replied the Colonel gently. "I am so sure of your good sense that I have no fear of your decision when you have once given your mind to it. I do not think that you could bear to see the old place sold and given over to that shoeblack, as it will be if we cannot raise the money somehow. Nor do I think you will like to begin life on your own account as a clerk in some office, with not as many shillings a-week as you have been accustomed to have pounds. And yet—I see no other chance for us."

"Why the deuce did you ever go on the Turf?" cried Sydney with a sudden outburst of insolence.

His father shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, yes," he answered tranquilly. "But if the favourite had won?"

"If!" cried Sydney; "a man ruins his family for an if!"

"A little hard but smart, my boy," said the Colonel quietly. "Of what consequence a few ill-tempered splutterings," he reflected philosophically, "if you can carry your point and get the main thing ruled to your liking? Syd might be as insolent as he chose poor boy, if he would marry Julia Manley at the end. It amused him, blew off the steam, and hurt no one else—just the play of the fish before he was landed; a thing for which experienced anglers must be prepared." Still the Colonel did not like his insolence. He would not quarrel with him for it, because it is impolitic to fall out with your tool; but he would stop it. So, rising, he laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, saying kindly in his very best manner—frank yet dignified, paternal yet friendly—

"Don't worry yourself now, dear boy. Time is valuable of course, but we are not going to be sold

up to-night. Think it over, and see what you can do. If you feel that Julia, poor soul, is really impossible, well—we must face our ruin like men and gentlemen; but if you think you could marry her with some reasonable prospect of happiness after—and you know my belief on the subject—why then we are saved, and old Hamley's triumph is cut from under him. I confess I shall be sorry if you decide against my wishes; but if it is for your happiness old fellow, I shall not grudge my share of the bill we must pay."

"Curse Hamley and all his crew!" cried Sydney savagely.

"Yes, so say I too; curse Hamley!" repeated his father. "I would sit here and swear at him till all was blue, if that would do any good; but as it will not, we might as well save our energies for useful things."

On which he lighted his cigar and strolled away, very sorry for poor Syd, but decidedly of opinion that the best thing he could do was to get out of his presence as soon as possible, and that solitude was the safest condition for his son at the present moment.

After a little while spent in useless thinking and vain regrets, Sydney Lowe, also lighting a cigar,

strolled away as his father had done ; and, ordering his horse, went for a ride, to see if a hard gallop through the leafy lanes and across the moor would clear his brain so that he could discover how to make two and two five, and in what manner it would be possible to put back the hand of time and cut the knot that could not be untied. And while he was riding he found himself in the Long Field lanes, and came suddenly upon James Garth standing with his chin resting in the palms of his hands, staring fixedly across the fields where Mr. Hamley's men were working, and where had he ventured he would have been warned off as a trespasser.

A sudden thought seemed to strike Sydney as he passed the man. His wild and haggard face put a vague and misty idea that had been passing through his brain into tangible shape. Here was a man who, as well as themselves, had wrongs to revenge ; a common peasant, therefore a creature without a conscience, and to be either bought or impressed. He rode forward for a short distance, then turned back and reined up as he came to Garth still standing where and as he had left him, his elbows on the gate and his chin resting in the palms of his hands.

"Good morning, Garth," said Sydney briskly.

The man looked up with the sidelong, quick, suspicious glance that had become habitual to him. He flung the young fellow a nod, but did not answer. Nothing disturbed him more than to be spoken to. He wanted to be left alone in the world, and to have no interruption to his mournful broodings.

"That's a sad sight, Garth," said Sydney, pointing with his whip to the fields. "I don't know when I was so sorry for anything as I was for this trouble of yours."

"Eh?" said Garth.

"I call it a damned shame," continued Sydney speaking with energy; "a cruel scandalous injustice."

Garth looked up. The passionate speech and accent of the gentleman struck him as odd. It was kind of him to feel so keenly for him, a poor man; but what call had a gentleman to take the sorrows of a horny-handed working-man to heart? It jarred him somehow; and yet it was kind.

"He laid his lines and he took it," said Garth slowly.

"Yes, I know all about that; and how you can stand there and see it all I can't make out," said



Sydney. "If the fellow had done as much by me, or half as much, I would have broken his head before now."

Garth's eye blazed out with sudden passion and his wan cheek flamed. He clenched his right hand and muttered something between his teeth. Sydney did not hear the words, but the look and the action were significant enough.

"That's what I say," repeated Colonel Lowe's son in a lower voice, and with a vicious kind of distinctness in his words. "If he had done as much by me, or half as much, I would have broken the fellow's head; and broken it so that it would not have been mended again in a hurry."

"It would be a good job done," said Garth as if to himself.

"A very good job!" said Sydney. "The fellow is the pest of the neighbourhood; a low-lived cur! He has neither the manners nor the feelings of a gentleman. If he got knocked on the head some dark night there is not a soul in the place but would feel that a nuisance had been got rid of, and would be right thankful to the hand that had done it."

"A rich man and few friends," Garth muttered.

He still spoke as if to himself, as if Sydney Lowe had passed out of his sphere altogether.

"A blackguard without one friend," said Sydney. "Why! how did he treat that nice girl of yours?—sent her off at a moment's notice because his wife had lost a pound or two! He did not dare to say why, but I happen to know that was the reason. What can you say of a man like that?"

James Garth made no reply; his face was still turned to the fields, his hand strongly clenched, his lips set, his eyes fixed and burning. A vision passed before him. He saw his enemy, the man who had tricked and sold him, walking before him in the evening darkness. He noted his jaunty stride, his chest thrown forward, his shoulders set square, his head well up, as a man who had conquered fortune and beaten all round in the game of life. He saw himself creeping after him with a stealthy step—a shadow dogging him as revenge dogs crime; he saw the distance gradually lessening, he gaining inch by inch upon him; he was creeping up to him, always in the shadow, till he was close—close; and now—

There was a cry that startled Sydney and made the men in the fields throw down their picks and spades and come hurrying to the gate.

"No! no! not murder! Good Lord! not murder!" shrieked James Garth, struggling and

foaming. He had had an epileptic fit once before in his life; this was only a recurrence.

"Who said murder?" asked one of the men looking darkly at Sydney.

"And what's to do here, sir?" asked another.

"I do not know what it all means," Sydney answered. As he spoke his face changed, and his eyes had the look of a quick thought in them. "That poor fellow," he then went on to say with an air of charitable disdain—he was a gentleman now, speaking of a boor to his fellow-boors—"that poor fellow there seems to have had a bad kind of thought. We were talking of Hamley, and he said how infamously he had been used, and then suddenly shouted 'murder!' I hope he was not thinking of doing for Mr. Hamley," with a slight smile that had a ghastly look in it.

"That's a hard word to say, sir," said one of the men sullenly. "James ain't the man to take life."

And Sydney, with a careless "Well, I hope not; but murder has an ugly sound with it," rode away revolving.

That night he and Dora had an unreal kind of interview; but one in which he was defeated. Each wore a mask, and both fenced cleverly, with more feints than threats; but she was the stronger

of the two and spoilt his game. He told her of his difficulties, his father's ruin, and the foreclosing of the mortgage; she sympathised with him in the dearest way, and complained of her own perplexities in the Hamley resolve to keep her as a kind of state prisoner at Abbey Holme for ever; and what could she do to help him? Between too little money and too much love, she thought life very hard and people very queer, she said, with a pretty shrug of her round uncovered shoulder—one of her nice little tricks that Sydney admired. He asked for her counsel as to what he should do, as she could not help him; and hinted at Miss Manley and her hundred thousand pounds; but she was too wise to take up his hint. She was determined that what he wanted her to know he should say in plain terms, leaving no loophole by which to creep out should things turn ill. Not that she wanted their marriage to continue, as things were, could it be safely broken. She would if she could have torn her marriage lines as she might have torn a milliner's bill that had been paid and done with. As she could not do that, she was not minded that Sydney should have any advantage she could not share.

She was so full of innocence and high-mindedness to-night, no man could possibly have proposed to

her a crime to which she must give her assent—so full of sweetness and love, no man could have told her he meant treachery and desertion. He was foiled at every turn. She would not understand his hints, and he could not quarrel with her. How can any one quarrel with a sweet, amiable, lovely little girl whose every accent is a caress, every word an endearment?—a soft, purring creature, sympathetic and responsive, and offering no more resistance than a ball of swansdown? The thing is impossible! You might as well try to play fives with that same ball of swansdown as cross swords with a woman of Dora Drummond's type when she has set her mind to yield and to fascinate, to guide by a silken thread—yet to hold with an iron hand.

Ever since Sydney had made her take that roll of ten sovereigns Dora had begun to hate him, and to hate him all the more because she had begun to fear him. She did not know what horror he might not force her to commit, if his necessities urged; and she did not like the unhappiness of which he had been the cause. Soft, sensual, self-indulgent women never do like to see unhappiness; it disturbs and annoys them; and for all her capacities for cruelty if she was pushed to it, Dora was essentially

good-natured when it did not cost her too much. Nevertheless, though she hated him to-night, she held him and she fascinated him, never having been more delightful, more endearing. Not that she would at any time have suffered herself to sink into the ordinary groove of English wives—that groove wherein they do not think it necessary to try to please their husbands; having got, not caring to retain. Had she detested the man who owned her she would have made herself none the less pleasant and coquettish to him. She might have poisoned him, and probably would, but she would have been careful to have handed him his dose of quietness with the prettiest little smile and in the most becoming little cap in the world. Ten minutes before she had eloped with her lover, she would have put her arms round her husband's neck and have called him a dear, and would have asked him if her dress was not pretty, and, smoothing her flounces, just the thing for a journey? Her creed was, that if disagreeable things had to be done, there was not the smallest reason why they should not be done pleasantly; and if jalap has to be taken, in the name of humanity smother it well in jam!

Sydney understood nothing of all this. He saw her as she chose he should see her, and took her at

her own valuation. Had things gone well with them, he would never have seen her other than as the sweetest and most amiable little girl the world had ever produced; he would have been even a better man through the soothing influence of her assumed virtues, just as the Hamleys were both happier and better through that same influence. He would have lived and died and have never learnt the truth to the last—not when he kissed her hand as she gave him the poisoned cup, and blessed his friend for whose sake she had given it. These women—soft, fair, and false—have ever been the women men love best. They have their uses; and one is that they sometimes avenge their honestest sisters.

When they were about to part, Sydney said half-jokingly, half-seriously; “What would you do Dody, if I was forced to marry Julia Manley?”

“Syd!” she answered, her cheek on his shoulder. “As I cannot imagine anything so dreadful, I cannot say what I would do.”

“You would scarcely give me in custody for bigamy?” he laughed.

“Why not, dear?” asked Dora, innocently.

“Why not? Because you would not like to be the wife of a felon, in the first place; nor a poor

little lost love, turned out of house and home and having to work for your living, in the second," he answered.

"As if I should mind what became of myself in such a horrible position as that!" was her reply. "There are two things for which all women, who are real women, would sacrifice themselves, Syd," she went on to say with her pretty professorial air; "love and revenge. I have gone far enough, as things are, for the one; I don't want to find out by experience how far I could or would go for the other."

"Not to your own ruin, though perhaps to mine," he said, smoothing her hair caressingly. "You might not care about me, but I am sure you would about yourself."

"I think I would sacrifice myself too, if I wanted to punish you," she said in the sweetest way.

And then he laughed and kissed her, and said she was a dear little transparent darling, and good fun to humbug—she believed everything he said to her.

To which Dora, smiling and showing her small white teeth, said—Why, of course she did! What were women for but to believe in and love their



husbands ? If—pouting—he humbugged her, that was very wrong, and very wicked of him. She never humbugged him, and she thought he ought to be as loyal to her.

“ Well, then, I will ! ” said Sydney. “ So I may not marry Julia Manley ? ”

“ If you do I will kill you and your Julia Manley too ! ” said Dora with the most enchanting assumption of viciousness.

He laughed again, and pretended to be afraid of her ; and then he vowed he would be a good boy, and so on ; with a dozen varieties of falsehood and folly. But when he went away he wondered to himself what Dora really would do if he were to marry Julia Manley ; as he must—he knew that well enough. It was horrible, detestable, but he must ! She could not betray him, let her threaten as much as she liked. The same reasons which had kept them both from confessing their marriage would keep her quiet when it was broken ; and for the far-off future—if the day should ever come when she should be poor and he rich ; a not very likely contingency, but if it should come—why then he must trust to the chapter of accidents, and hope for a miracle ; as weak men and bad men do.

But what a dear she was !—his fluid thoughts

went that way now. How could he ever give her up? What a perplexing pass he was in! What could he do,—how could he save himself from pain and annoyance? How warmly he would have welcomed the Mephistopheles who would have got him safely out of this cleft stick in which he was held, even by the payment of that shadowy thing he called his soul! And this thought brought him once more to the remembrance of James Garth and *his* soul; and what a blessed solution of all present difficulties it would be, could that half-mad fellow be induced to break old Hamley's head one of these dark nights, and so end the coil once and for ever! What would become of him, the murderer, afterwards was a thing of no consequence. He was played out; and whether he died in the workhouse or a mad-house, of starvation or on the gallows, his life was done for and the manner of the end signified but little. How could he tempt him? he thought; how get the idea into his poor feverish head? Probably the old ruffian had left Dora well provided for. If only he could be swept out of existence at this juncture, how smooth the road would be!

Meanwhile Dora, on her side, resolved never again to meet as of old Sydney Lowe, her lawful husband. What he intended to do, she thought, let

him, without counsel or consent from her. If she wished to keep him in her power, as she did, he must tie his own nooses and slip his own head into them without help or hindrance so far as she was concerned. Her rôle was innocence coupled with devotion; and she must be careful of both the properties and business belonging to her part. This was her resolve, as she crept back into the house, and locked up the key of the postern gate in her most sacred drawer. The plot was thickening unpleasantly; and she was quite acute enough to know that her safest place was one to the side, where she could observe but where she was not included.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ABANDONED TO HERSELF.

MRS. HAMLEY was not a woman to do things by halves. What she said she generally meant, and she had not that kind of nature, morally severe and physically tender, which promises hard things and does soft ones. On the contrary, if her words were severe her actions ran them close; so that when she told Patricia she was cast out of her love and abandoned to herself—given her freedom on the one hand, but receiving desolation on the other—she said what her heart dictated; and she acted up to it.

Patricia was in very truth abandoned to herself. She was never scolded, never thwarted, never denied, because absolutely ignored. She came and went, and no notice was taken of her; no-one asked where she had been or what she had done. She took her place at the table, and the servants at-

tended on her with the rest; but she was not included in the inner kingdom, and if she made an observation, which was not often, her words fell flat and without response. Had she absented herself, no one would have asked for her until the thing had begun to look serious; and once when she was late for luncheon and made her excuse in her old frank, hurried way, her aunt answered coldly: "Pray do not give yourself the trouble to apologise. It really does not signify the least in the world whether you are late or not."

Abandoned to herself; cut off from all family communion; denied even the friendliness of rebuke; it was infinitely worse than being coerced and herded as in the older days; and Aunt Hamley intended that she should feel it worse. To add to Patricia's troubles, there was not only "a cut" between the Abbey Holme people and the Fletchers, owing to their taking Alice Garth without a character—which cut perhaps Patricia might have ignored in any circumstances, and more especially in these present ones—but they were away. Had they been at home, poor Garth would not have been ruined. So that she was utterly alone at home and without a friend abroad.

Dora would have been kind to her in secret, and,

to do her justice, always tried to put in a conciliatory word for her when she could without hurting herself, and which Mrs. Hamley, even while she rebuked, treasured up as evidence of her favourite's sweet and lovely nature; but Patricia would have none of her. Her heart had turned against the Dora of the actual, and she refused to be caressed back to belief. The Dora she had loved had died, and had left behind her nothing but a memory and a regret. The Dora who remained was a mere show, a mask, an unreality; and she would not join hands again with one who had deceived her as she had done. Her self-respect, too, was outraged at having been made a tool wherewith to work iniquity, and her sense of honour had been revolted. She had touched pitch and she felt defiled. And yet perhaps, Patricia in future years would develop sufficient passionateness to be able to touch pitch voluntarily in certain circumstances—as the offering of her soul to the good of a cause. But if this might be true of the future it certainly was not of the present, when the law of girlish righteousness allowed of no deviation from the right line, and when she was both too young and too straightforward for casuistry; and when, take it how she would, supplying Sydney Lowe with money stolen

from Mr. Hamley was scarcely reason enough why she should have been dragged into the mire of a crime, innocent of all criminal knowledge though she was. So there she stood amidst the wreck of more than home and fortune ; like some worshipper of the old-time gods taken by the initiated into the secret places, and shown the tricks by which the awful holy thunderings were made, and the glorious beauty of the Divine revealed, and the kneeling crowd held captive to the faith it never proved.

Night and day she thought of all this—of the Dora she had loved and believed in and of the Dora she had found in the place of her ideal ; of the good success of baseness ; and then of her old life at Barsands ; till she scarcely knew which was real, the present or the past, and whether her uncle's teaching had been right or her aunt's commentary wrong. Her mental condition was in truth for the moment slightly clouded. Her brain had been overtaxed, and was fogged like an imperfect photographic plate. She had to fight through it alone. It was a bad pass for a girl given to singleness of mind and purpose and belief ; but it had to be gone through ; and there was so much good in it that the struggle would make her all the stronger,

and she would be a nobler woman at the end of it than she was in the beginning.

The warm spring days were mellowing into summer. There was no earthly reason, thought Patricia, why she should not sit out of doors under the shade of copper beeches and elms and horn-beams, as well as in the heavy rooms of the magnificent mansion. And as no one asked, though Mrs. Hamley always took care to know, where she was, she did sit out of doors the whole day long ; which was just the best thing she could have done. Had she exhausted her strength at this time she would probably have fallen ill. All she wanted was quiet and fresh air, and to be left to regain her mental clearness undisturbed by any outside influence whatever.

The poor girl bore herself with signal patience and dignity all this miserable time of undeserved disgrace ; and with as signal loyalty. Knowing that her aunt disliked her going about alone, she would not have left the immediate home-grounds under any temptation. She always sat in one place in the shrubbery, out of sight but not lost, and within the range of the meal-time gong. The day when she had been late she had fallen asleep, but she never let herself be overtaken again ; and even



her aunt, disposed as she was to see her in an unfavourable light in which way soever she was facettèd, could not but acknowledge that without the smallest attempt to reinstate herself, she did not take a rebellious advantage of her freedom, but ordered her life with as faithful a regard to rules as if she benefited by their observance.

Mrs. Hamley almost wished she had not been so loyal. It cut the ground of displeasure from under her own feet, and made the girl's conduct about the cheque only the more inexplicable. For who indeed could understand such a strange mixture of qualities? she used to say peevishly; so good in some things, so bad in others, and so tiresome in all! Perhaps it was wrong, she would add, to wish that she should be more wicked than she was; but it would be more comfortable and more harmonious. These composite characters were trying to deal with, and gave her a disagreeable sense of unrest.

So she grumbled, as was her wont, and watched with a strange confusion of mind, half anxiously, half fearfully, for signs of greater iniquity or for symptoms of repentant subjection. And when neither came she resented her disappointment as an offence. This was one phase of mind; another was a very real unhappiness about the girl's condition—when

she did not remember that she was angry. She used to watch her wistfully enough when Patricia was not looking, and ever with a heartache which neither her pride nor her anger would suffer to be seen. She noted how the healthy appetite which had so much distressed her in the first days by its unlimited appropriation of dry bread, had refined now into a sick indifference to food altogether. She saw how thin she had become, how listless in her movements, how feeble in her gait; how her once responsive face was fixed and rigid, and her once bright eyes veiled and dreamy. She sometimes longed to take her to her bosom, to scold her viciously, then to cry over her and forgive her, and consent to accept the whole affair as a mystery wherein she was not blameworthy. And then she remembered Lord Merrian, and hardened her heart like an English Pharaoh. Besides, Mrs. Hamley's temper could not brook mysteries in the minor world about her. She claimed to be supreme pontiff to whom all things should be known; and if she felt at one moment an impulse of tenderness she was able to damp it down into manageable displeasure the next when she put it clearly before her that Patricia had dared to have a secret, and to keep it from her.

In the midst of all this, Patricia's daily dress got shabby ; and a letter came from Gordon.

For her own sake as mistress of Abbey Holme, also for a certain womanliness of feeling still left for the girl amidst all her displeasure, Mrs. Hamley must keep up appearances to high-water mark. She could no more allow her niece to be ill-dressed now, in the days of her dire disgrace, than if she had been foremost in favour. She was spiritually the Cinderella of the family, seated among the ashes weeping, but her body must be clothed with decorous magnificence as befitted the mansion in which she had her place.

Wherefore one day at breakfast Aunt Hamley said in a cold voice—

“Patricia, oblige me by not wearing that gown again.”

Patricia started, and looked up as if awakened from a dream. It was so strange to be spoken to again ! Dora glanced up with a friendly little congratulatory smile which swept from Patricia to Mrs. Hamley, and on to Mrs. Hamley's husband in an impartial way, excluding none.

“Yes, aunt,” Patricia exclaimed.

Mrs. Hamley smiled sarcastically.

"You are ready with your promises," she said.  
 "Pray what will you wear instead?"

"I don't know, aunt," she said. "Have I any other?"

"What a question to ask!" cried her aunt crossly. "A young woman of your age not to know what gowns she has to wear! Is it stupidity or affectation, Patricia?"

"Stupidity I am afraid, aunt," said Patricia quietly.

Mrs. Hamley hesitated for a moment. The girl spoke with such touching simplicity; her sorrowful face, which had lightened up under the address, was so full of ingenuous humility; she looked so glad to be spoken to again, and yet was so little self-assertive, so unaffected, that her aunt did not know whether to call her to her and kiss her and forgive her, or scold her for being so wicked when she was so nice. She was so angry with her for her stupidity—putting herself into this miserable position when she might have made such a brilliant alliance, atoned for her mysterious crime, and done them all so much good! And yet she was so sorry for her!

Her momentary little struggle ended however, in the maintenance of her old attitude of displeasure,

so she only answered, as coldly as she had spoken before :—

“Well, never mind what you have or have not. You will find a new gown in your room to-day ; so pray condescend to attend a little to mundane things, Patricia ; give the one you are wearing to Bignold to put away, and do not let me have to speak to you about your personal appearance again. You are going about like a cinder-wench ! ”

“I did not know I was shabby,” said Patricia looking at her dress.

“Then you know it now,” snapped her aunt.

“Mrs. Hamley has given you such a pretty dress ! ” said Dora pleasantly.

“I have done my best for a most ungrateful subject,” said Mrs. Hamley with her martyr’s air.

“Thank you, aunty, very much,” said Patricia turning a tender face towards her ; a moist-eyed face, with the curved lips slightly quivering.

“Thank your uncle whom you have wronged,” said Mrs. Hamley severely.

“Thank you, Mr. Hamley,” repeated Patricia.

“Ah ! ” said that gentleman plunging and fingering his whiskers, and not sorry to see the bonds relaxed a moment ; for though he too was angry at the fault, he was sorry for the person, and would

gladly have joined hands over the mystery weeks ago, and have accepted it and reinstated the delinquent; but the Lady was mistress, and he found it best to follow her lead when once within the four walls of Abbey Holme. Still he was pleased at this little break so far. "To return good for evil, eh?—heaping coals of fire? I told you that you were welcome to your diet and your clothes, and I am a man of my word. I don't promise and when the time comes cry off, and don't perform, do I, Lady?"

"No, Mr. Hamley; you always fulfil your promises," said Mrs. Hamley; "which is more than can be said for every one."

At this moment the butler brought in the letter-bag, which was opened and the letters distributed by Mr. Hamley as usual. Among them came that long-expected, long-desired ship-letter, with its many official notifications, its signs of travel, its promise of abundance.

"For Miss Kemball," said Mr. Hamley, throwing it across the table.

She took it. A mist came before her eyes. She forgot her aunt and her late more mollified mood, Dora's pretty little congratulatory face, Mr. Hamley's ostentatious graciousness; she forgot Abbey Holme and her present misery and all that

was her life now—she had Gordon's letter; Gordon was alive; he loved her; he would come back for her some day; he believed in her and would trust her.

She held the letter in her hand, breathless while she looked at it and took in the fact that it was really from him—his handwriting—paper he had touched—words into which he had put his life; unconscious of the cold inquiring eyes that were looking at her, weighing and measuring, judging and condemning. She was called back from her memory of the frank, fair, honest face, the clear voice resonant and yet so tender, the bright blue eyes that had never been ashamed to meet man face to face and that would not be afraid to meet death and the Eternal—she was called back from her vision of the dear future when he should come and take her hands in his before the whole world, and lead her from darkness to light, from imprisonment to freedom, from degradation and despair to life and love, by her aunt saying in her harshest manner; “When you have quite finished staring at that envelope, Patricia; perhaps you will attend to your uncle saying grace.”

They had never had breakfast grace at Barsands; but they had thanked God more through the day.

Then the vision faded away, and she was once more Patricia the reputed forger, or at least the guilty accomplice; once more a dependant in disgrace; the truth living among lies, which they had had the power to make appear the blackest lie of all.

She stood up with the rest, and walked out of the room with the rest; but though the brief moment of the loosing of the spell had passed, and her aunt had hardened herself against her once more, and she was only Cinderella among her ashes again, she felt as if she had a talisman now which could change all things, and that even Aunt Hamley would have to yield to it.

She went into the garden to her usual seat, and read her letter. It was a long, true, and loving one; the second Gordon had written though the first she had received. It said all that words could say, and expressed more than it said. It spoke of courage, faith, constancy, patience, and of the reward which comes to true love in the end. It told her how she was his hope, his dream, his beloved; but it was the letter of a man as well as of a lover, and of a sailor above all; a sailor full of professional ardour and a not ignoble ambition, rejoicing in the life to which he had devoted himself and glorying in his work. It



came like one of the old Barsands breezes into the dull and stifling fog of Milltown, and seemed to clear the horizon of her life. It roused her as nothing else could have done, and seemed to give her new energy and to bring her back to herself and the need of action and a purpose. It was like the lifting up of a material veil from her eyes, the taking of a weight from her hands. She belonged not only to herself and to her aunt, but to Gordon. Was she living now as his wife should live? Was this dull and clouded patience under injustice the noblest thing she could do, or was there a better way? Ought she for his sake to remain where she was so misjudged, so hardly punished?—or ought she not rather to withdraw herself from Abbey Holme, and, ever keeping loyal silence, refuse to undergo more humiliation? Patience and humility are grand virtues truly; sweet and true Christian graces; but the old, heroic, pagan self-respect, which also was integral to Patricia's nature, was a virtue too, and just now was in the ascendant. Hitherto she had proved her patience, now she must justify her self-honour.

It was on the fourth day after she had received this dear letter, and when she had heard Mr. Hamley say how he had met that precious pair of

Tom Noddies, the Fletchers, in the Market-place that day, that she went to her aunt sitting in the drawing-room as usual, with her many-coloured worsteds in her hands, with dear Dora still busy at Venetian point and butterflies for the hair by her own little especial table. It was a sunless sultry day, but only one window of the room was open about a couple of inches from the top.

"Aunt," said Patricia coming in and going up to her aunt, very quietly and with the sadness always on her now, but with a strange look of determination in her face and manner; "May I speak to you?"

Her aunt looked up at her curiously.

"Certainly," she answered with a surprised kind of condescension. "What is it you wish to say?"

"I cannot go on living like this," said Patricia with quivering earnestness.

Mrs. Hamley bowed her head.

"And what do you propose to do to alter it?" she asked.

"Let me go away," she cried.

"Willingly. Where?—to do what?"

"Let me earn my own living," said Patricia.

"Willingly again. But," with Mrs. Hamley's special smile, "to come from heroics and generalities to common-sense details—how do you propose to

earn your own living? As a governess? What can you teach? For my own sake I cannot allow you to go out as a servant; besides you cannot wait at table, and I could scarcely recommend your honesty," she said cruelly; "and ability to steer a yacht on to the rocks, or even to ride barebacked, will not I fear get you a living. This last might indeed do for the circus; but I see no other opening. I am willing to discuss any scheme with you, but it must be a rational one."

All this was cruelly said; with intentional harshness and insolence. Patricia turned pale and her hands clasped each other with a nervous pressure. She held her breath for a moment; and then as if she had cast her anger from her as a meaner thing, raised her eyes and said with a sweet and touching dignity, a noble patience that was the maturer fruit of her former girlish cheerfulness; "I know that I am very ignorant, but I would indeed rather go out as a servant, earning my own bread by my own labour, than live like this."

"Are you so very cruelly treated here?" returned Mrs. Hamley as if asking an honest question. "Who offends you? Dora, do you do anything to offend Patricia?" Dora shook her head. "If you have any complaint to make, Patricia, pray

make it. It seems to me that you are left very much to yourself and have no cause to grumble. I do not interfere with you. To be sure I would not like you to disgrace the house by any wild or wicked ways; but, failing this, I really do not see how you are coerced or what cause you have to complain."

"Ah, aunt, you do not speak as you feel—as you know," said Patricia.

"Thank you, Patricia. At my age it is not quite usual to be told one tells falsehoods." Mrs. Hamley said this with ominous quietness. It was merely an argument she was holding, not an offence she was resenting.

"I did not mean that exactly," returned Patricia; "but you want to try me. You will not come to my point, and when people do that——"

"They do tell falsehoods?" she said.

"In a way, yes," answered Patricia bravely.

Her aunt smiled disagreeably.

"Are you adopting exactly the right method to make things better for yourself?" she asked. "Shall we, for your sake and before you commit yourself farther, go back to the starting-point? What do you purpose to do if you leave Abbey Holme?"

"I see nothing now," she said with a candid throwing up of her cards. After a pause, she added, in a pleading voice—"Aunt, will you let me go to the Fletchers for a little while? I know they are at home, and I am sure they would take me."

"As a dependant?—if you please. Why not? It will be simply a change of place not circumstances," said Mrs. Hamley quietly.

"Aunt, don't!" cried Patricia in a kind of agony. "Well!" she then said, pressing her hands over her eyes, "let me go. Miss Fletcher will understand me and believe me."

Dora flushed a little, and glanced upward. She was very sorry for the necessity, but she did not exactly want Patricia to be understood. Mrs. Hamley flushed too.

"I know you love Miss Fletcher better far than you have ever loved me," she began in a level tone that soon rose to the graver accent of displeasure, and that finally deepened into anger. "Go to her if you wish it. I should be sorry to keep you. Carry your false tales out of the house, and make out that you have been ill-treated when you have only been too kindly considered. Ungrateful, disobedient, untrustworthy girl, you leave me as you

came to me, a creature I have been utterly unable to improve, and, with all my kindness, as utterly unable to make love me. Not another word. Leave me, I say. If the Fletchers, or any one else, will keep you till you are of age, when I can wash my hands of you for ever, I shall thank them. Go! *Will* you go, Patricia? I want never to see you again!"

"Will you not say good-bye, aunt?" said Patricia, standing before her, holding out her hands. "I did not mean to vex you. I do not like to part in anger."

"No, I will not say good-bye," answered Aunt Hamley. "The word means a blessing. I cannot bless you. Go!"

"Aunt!"

The depth of anguish in the girl's voice made Mrs. Hamley's every nerve quiver; but she was not minded to yield to her weakness. She looked resolutely away from the pleading face, the beseeching figure, the imploring gesture.

"Not another word. Go!" she said again.

Patricia turned her eyes on Dora. Dora was crying, with a slightly scared look on her flushed face;—sincerely sorry for poor Patricia; sorry, too, for Mrs. Hamley, who wounded herself as much as she hurt her niece; hating herself and Sydney and all

that had led to this miserable complication—nevertheless keeping silence.

“Good-bye, Dora,” then said Patricia. “Make my aunt forgive me,” she added, as with a stifled sob she left the room.

The innocent scapegoat on whom was laid the burden of many sins, if ever she needed faith of the best kind it was now!

That day Patricia was driven down to the Fletchers’ with her boxes. Bignold had had orders to pack up everything belonging to Miss Kemball, and the coachman took her, wondering, to the Hollies. It was very like a dismissal, he thought; more especially when he saw by the maid’s astonishment that the young lady was not expected.

“A rumpus, I make it out,” he said to Mary Anne confidentially; and Mary Anne thought he was about right.

“My child!” cried Catherine Fletcher as Patricia came into the room, the shadow of her former self; thin to as much gauntness as a young girl can have; depressed, strange, subdued; all her brightness dulled; her former abounding vitality gone; the whole being and manner of the brave and cheerful Barsands nymph changed as if she had been transformed—changed as a green

wood is changed when a fire or a storm has swept through it. "Good heavens what has happened?" she cried in real alarm.

"Oh! Miss Fletcher, do not think me mad, but do take me for awhile! Let this be my home; I have none other!" cried Patricia flinging herself into her arms. "You are my only friends. Keep me just a little while till I can keep myself."

"Child—my dear, dear girl! what is all this about?" cried Dr. Fletcher, coming to her.

She held out her hands.

"Will you take me, Dr. Fletcher?" she cried prayerfully. "Just for a little while, till I get strong and can see my way?"

His face changed.

"For life, if you will, Patricia," he answered, holding her hands in his. "Don't say, 'only for a little while.'"

"Oh, how kind you are," Patricia said, looking into his face; "but don't be too kind to me just now—I don't want to cry."

"I should not like to see you do anything weak or silly," said Miss Fletcher gravely; "so don't cry, but tell us what it all means."

"It means that I am in utter disgrace at Abbey Holme, and that my life is too intolerable there. I



cannot go on as I am," said Patricia; "so I asked aunt if I might come here. I felt sure you would take me for a few days; and she was angry, and sent me with all my things, as if to live here. This was her punishment to me because I asked."

"She was quite right," said Catherine Fletcher kindly. "She never did a better nor a wiser thing. She knew that she could not have made me a more delightful present if she had given me half her wealth."

"Quite right," repeated Dr. Fletcher. "I scarcely gave the old lady credit for such perspicacity. So now, missy, you are at home remember—at home for life if you will."

"But now you must hear my story before you take me," said Patricia with her eager candour. "I do not think you will disbelieve me, but it is just possible you may, and I should like you to know what has happened."

"Will it take long? Shall I keep the carriage with the boxes at the door till you have made your confession? or shall I walk by faith and have them carried into the blue bedroom?" asked Miss Fletcher pleasantly.

"You had better keep them till you have heard," was the grave answer.

"As if my Patricia could do anything worthy of

condemnation!" said Catherine Fletcher, putting her comfortable arm round the girl's neck and looking into her face lovingly.

Patricia caught her hand, and kept it there on her shoulder.

"You believe me then? you will believe me, however much appearances are against me?"

"If you say that you are innocent—yes," answered Catherine emphatically.

"And you too?" Patricia turned to Dr. Fletcher.

"I? I would not believe that you could do anything wrong if you tried," he said. "And if you were even to confess to a grave misdemeanour, I think I should have recourse to a blister on your head and a dose of blue pill. I would rather accept the theory of temporary monomania than that of intentional immorality."

She drew a long breath.

"That is comforting," she said. "It seems to heal me somehow."

Then with her hands clasped over her friend's, but every now and then turning her eyes to that friend's brother, she made her simple statement—how that she had been asked to change a cheque at the bank and to say nothing about it; how that she had done so, and had agreed to say nothing about it; how that cheque had turned out to be a forgery,

for which she was held responsible because of her silence.

"But," she said with a kindling face, "as I promised faithfully not to tell, I must keep my word, whatever it costs me. I know nothing about it in any way. I simply did what I was asked to do, and I had not the faintest idea there was any wrong connected with it."

"And the person who asked you knows all that has happened since?" asked Dr. Fletcher.

"Yes," answered Patricia.

"And has made no sign?"

"No," she said; "but," nervously, "please do not ask me any questions. I want to say nothing, because I might say too much if I did. I must be true to my word."

"So you shall be, dear," said Miss Fletcher, kissing her. "We will never question you. We both believe in you implicitly, don't we, Henry? and can see how it all happened as clearly as if we had been there. So now go up-stairs and take off your things. At last I have a daughter of my own!"

"A friend to share our home, to make it bright for us and to make her own happiness in it," said Dr. Fletcher hurriedly.

"It is so strange to hear myself loved again. I scarcely know if it is pain or pleasure. It feels almost too strong for me," Patricia murmured rather than spoke, pushing up her hair dreamily.

Brother and sister exchanged looks.

"Come, dear," said Catherine Fletcher briskly, "we don't dream at the Hollies. We must have the boxes seen to, and your things put away, child; and, now I remember, there are three or four gowns and things of mine hanging up in your wardrobe. What an intrusion! Come, let us make haste and get all in order before dinner-time."

Her voice and manner roused the girl pleasantly. With a little laugh that had just the beginning of a natural joyousness in it, she left the room with her friend, and in less than an hour was unpacked and homed, with a delicious sentiment of rest and peace stealing like sleep over her.

When they were alone together, Catherine asked her brother; "What do you think of all this, Henry?"

"I think it is evident; Miss Drummond," he answered.

"So I think; but what does it all mean? There is a mystery beyond; what can it be?"

"That is just the difficulty," he said; "but the

person for whom Patricia acted was evidently 'dear Dora,' as Mrs. Hamley calls her."

"Yes; evidently; I always felt she was under-hand."

"Tyranny. Tyrants make slaves, and all slaves are false," was his answer.

"But how cruelly they seem to have treated this poor child. How changed she is!"

Dr. Fletcher's quiet brown eyes glanced with an angry vivacity—rare in him.

"Cruelly! They have tried to kill her, body and soul!" he cried. "As if cruelty is only physical! Why, this girl has been assassinated—murdered! All that was best and most beautiful in her they have tried to crush out, because it did not square with their wretched, shallow lives! Had she died under their hands it would have been substantially murder—if not legally so."

He spoke with a vehemence his sister never remembered to have noted in him before. She looked at him anxiously; then rubbed her eyes with her forefingers, which was a trick of hers when she was puzzled. Just now Henry puzzled her immensely; and the key to the riddle was wanting.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DISILLUSIONED.

NO other arrangement could have helped Patricia at this moment so well as this of making her home with the Fletchers. Not even the return of Gordon and the fulness of her love with him would have done her so much good—taking the phrase in its highest sense. Had he come back and married her off hand, as he would have done, she would have been intensely happy, of course ; and happiness with some natures is a fine soil for the growth of the lovelier virtues ; but she would not have learnt all she was learning now, and she would therefore have lost the spiritual richness given by the sympathy which comes of knowledge.

She was eminently purposeful in character, and she was leading now a purposeful life. And one different in kind from anything she had known before. As her uncle's housekeeper and companion

at Barsands, she had had her work and her uses in a small sphere, but wholesome so far as it went ; but here and now her horizon was enlarged, and her mind gained in proportion. She was Doctor Fletcher's pupil indoors, and Catherine's companion abroad. By the one, her intellect was trained with more mastership than it had ever been trained before : and the other took her among her old friends, the poor, where she must perforce pity and was able to help. Her life was passed out of herself as it used to be at Barsands, but on a higher platform ; and the more it was dedicated to the service of others, the more her own sorrows and perplexities fell into the background and became of less magnitude and importance. She went among the poor and heard the sorrowful stories of their lives ; she saw their hard struggles with misery, disease, and debt ; and she watched their pathetic patience under their afflictions. Sometimes it was their brutish patience, the submission of "dumb driven cattle" too spiritless to wish for better things, too degraded to strive for them ; and sometimes, it was the recklessness which grows on that sandy soil where there is no hope—the scamped work, the filched time, the husbands who left their wives to starve, and cared neither for home nor duty so long

as they could drink away their ill-earned wages ; the wives that were slatternly shrews who drank too, and cast to the winds every womanly virtue and every lesson of decent living ; the mothers whose children were unwelcome enemies, fetters and hindrances in the great battle of life, so many extra mouths to feed out of the common stock which they wished the fever or the frosts would take away, and which were taken away with at least the help of neglect if of nothing more active ; men and women whom poverty, ignorance, and the terrible conflict in which they found themselves worsted on all sides, oppressed by man, forgotten by God, had reduced to the level of savages, and some to the level of beasts—all this she saw with a burning heart ; her inherent desire to be of use breaking out with tenfold force as she came to a more accurate knowledge of the work that had to be done. And she was of use, and never weary. Like Catherine herself, she gave up herself to the service of humanity and to the alleviation of suffering. Her life was passed among the poor, with no superior patronage demanding gratitude and submission, no fine lady daintiness playing at benevolence for a country pastime that went no deeper than croquet or a new costume ; but as a sister, a child, more richly endowed than them-



selves, and sharing her treasures with those who had none. Reading to the sick and to the old ; taking girlish gifts of use, or prettiness, or pleasure only, to the children ; adding the grace and brightness of her youth to the motherly prevision of Miss Fletcher ; comforting those in sorrow ; helping those in need ; speaking good words of human fellowship to those who had hitherto so sorely failed—digging down into these arid souls for the sweet waters of conscience and self-respect, and seldom digging in vain—this was her work now done hand in hand with her older friend. And it made a beautiful life for her ; a life full of blessing given and received ; a life wherein she grew into a loveliness of soul and body surpassing all she had yet attained ; a life which gave back the nobleness it wrought and the happiness it dispensed, such as is ever found, no matter what the pattern of their flag, by those who have thus consecrated themselves to this service of humanity.

In the beautiful activities of the present she wondered more than ever at the purposeless existence of Abbey Holme ; its ladylike excuses for idleness in those eternal strips of needlework and endless rolls of parti-coloured knitting which filled up the hours for her aunt and Dora with such a

comfortable conviction of industry ; its want of depth at home or of interest abroad ; its absence of all object or intention save the maintenance of the proprieties and the smoothest manner of passing time. She wondered just as much now at their material arrangements too, as she did in the beginning ; and still more at herself, that she had lived through them for those long weary months. How stifling it was ! Those dreadful flues which went through the house and made it all as hot as a greenhouse ; those thick velvet-pile carpets and heavy curtains and closed windows and huge fires ; those dull evenings when she was expected to interest herself in *bézi*que which she could never understand, and was not allowed to read or employ her hands in such work only as she could do—and it was not fine work ; those dull days ; those languid, compressed, silent weeks and months ! She felt she could not have lived there at all had it not been for Dora ; and how kind Dora was in the beginning ! Kind, yes, always ; at the end quite as kind as in the beginning ; even when she had ruined her doing her best to make her pain less painful ! But how all that sweetness of manner had vanished into a mere bubble of no meaning, as she found out the unworthiness underlying the real nature ! It seemed

to her, looking back and reflecting, that Dora would have been less unworthy had she been less amiable; for to Patricia, as well as to Mr. Hamley, stratified characters, part noble, part base, were distressing, and she thought that a bad person had better be bad all through than only in bits; souls that are like Dead Sea apples being apt to mislead the innocent to fatal issues.

Ah! it was a dreadful time and place to remember! like gazing back into a prison, where "an angel beautiful and bright" had come down and looked her in the face, like that angel who bewildered the poor knight of whom Dr. Fletcher read to her the sweet sad story the other night; an angel who had made the gloom shine like sunlight while she stayed, but who had vanished one day, making the worst darkness of all! Sometimes a horrible dread used to come over her that perhaps her aunt would fall into a softer mood towards her and send for her again, to tell her she was forgiven, and that she was to be a better girl for the future, and copy Dora with more zealous exactness, and be sure not to tell any more stories, or have to do with forgery or shameful secrets. She used to wake at night in terror, dreaming that this had happened, and that she was being dragged back to the Abbey Holme drawing-

room where she could not find the door and where the windows were all closed. It was a dream that always shook her nerves for days after, and that made both Dr. Fletcher and Catherine intensely anxious when it came, for it was a sign that had a bad meaning. Patricia, however, could not get rid of the thought; it haunted her waking as well as sleeping. She used to ask herself what she should do if this chance came about; and sometimes she used to ask the Fletchers, with a clinging kind of mental terror that distressed them even more than did her dream. When she did, Catherine, to cover her deeper feeling, would laugh and promise to hide her somewhere among the rocks like an old-world fugitive; but the feeding would be difficult, she used to say; and once Dr. Fletcher, not looking up, said in a constrained manner; "It will be your own fault if you go; you have a home here for life, if you wish it."

There did not seem to be much chance, however, of this recall. As things stood, Mrs. Hamley refused to see either the Fletchers or Patricia. She held the one as a criminal and the others as her aiders and abettors; and, as she said in her note to Patricia wherein she declined a visit her niece had proffered, she had always made it a rule in life to give up the

acquaintance of people who did wrong. She did not understand else what difference those who honoured the Ten Commandments could make between vice and virtue ; and as she considered that Patricia had sinned heinously, she necessarily held that Doctor and Miss Fletcher had made themselves parties to her offence by taking her as they had done from under her protection, undoing all the good she had been at such pains to effect, and defying her right of anger and punishment.

So the breach was very wide and very pronounced between the Hollies and Abbey Holme, and Milltown had a comfortable little dish of gossip to discuss, wherein not one of the guesses was true and not an arrow hit the right mark. Enough was known, however, for abundant speculation ; and the Milltown people did not neglect their opportunities.

Chief of the humble friends to whom Catherine and Patricia went with their kind acts and heartsome words, was poor Mrs. Garth doing her brave battle with misfortune single-handed, and bearing her husband's collapse as well as their joint sorrow with a steadfast courage that was as sublime in its own way as any of those deeds of heroism which have stirred the world's imagination for all time

and changed the current of history. Ah, how many of these poor hard-handed, rough-speeched brothers and sisters of ours, whom now we despise as "the common people" just admitted into the outer courts of humanity, will be shining angels in the days to come; while we who wear soft clothing and walk delicately, will be turned down in the ranks and set to learn some elementary lessons of virtue far beneath their feet! Between the Hamleys and the Garths of society lie more gulfs than one; and the "wisdom which is conversant with God" does not always dwell with the former.

Yet how brave soever Mrs. Garth was, her path was very rough; and she felt it to be so. There was no lack of immediate means; but the future—that terrible future—troubled her greatly; and not without reason—it was all so utterly dark! Time seemed to work but little good for James. He was still as broken-spirited as ever; though to be sure he had twice done a day's work for Dr. Fletcher, and it seemed to have heartened him and brought back a flash of his old cheery manhood while the impulse to be doing lasted. The worst of it was, it lasted for so short a time; and then he sank back into the wandering idleness of his former state, haunting the lanes that looked on to Long Field

Farm, and breaking his heart at every change being wrought in field or fence. If he had lost his land fairly, perhaps he would have been as brave in his sorrow as his wife; but it was the sense of having been tricked, and tricked by Mr. Hamley above all men, that was the poison in the wound and hindered it from healing. It was madness, granted; but it was pitiable all the same.

One day Patricia was out for a walk by herself. The Fletchers were calling at the Quest, and she was to be picked up on their way home. She had never told them why she did not care to go to the grand house, but they could imagine plenty of reasons, if none of them the true one; and she was therefore left behind as a matter of course, without questions or explanations. She went up by the farm on her way to meet them, taking the lane where she and Dora had walked that botanizing day when they had met Lord Merrian, and Mrs. Garth, as the farmyard Constance, had broken the conventional canon of fitness by railing in Doric against a rich man's injustice.

What a lifetime had passed between this and then! She felt as far removed from the perplexed and entangled self of that day as she had felt removed then from the joyous Barsands Patricia

who had never known a heartache and never a tear, till that last sad hour when all had gone to wreck together. How changed the whole aspect of life was now from what it had been both then and in the old, old days of the dear home! Little introspective as she was, her heart was perforce turned back on itself to-day, and she could not choose but look within, asking herself how things were with her and noting where they differed from the past. The answer was well. She was happier now than she had been, in spite of that terrible shadow under which she lived; but how much graver, how much less joyous! how the scales of girlish blindness and unconscious romance had fallen for ever from her eyes, and what terrible truths had been revealed to her!

Then she thought of Lord Merrian, and his strange love for her. What was there in her, a simple country girl without family or fortune, to attract a man in his position? Why, nothing! It was just a day-dream to him—no more; his reason had gone to sleep, and he had wandered in his dream. She remembered with a blush that one rapid thought which had come like a vision of temptation, of the good she could do the world through him, and the power she would have had. And then



she looked up, as if some one had been walking with her to whom she was speaking aloud, as she thought ; " But I have found that I can do good as I am ; that we all can if we like ; and that I need not be Lord Merrian's wife to make a few hearts lighter and a few lives better."

The root of this thought was a miserable young couple fast going to ruin, whom Catherine and she had visited much and taken in hand to teach and improve, and whom they had both taught and improved. The chief evil had been the young wife's incapacity and the young husband's impatience ; but a well-ordered home, the means whereof had been partly taught and partly given, had closed the gin-shop door and made a worthy household out of a pauperized and vicious hovel. This was just one of the instances of remediable ignorance of which they so often spoke at the Hollies, where it was held as a cardinal article of faith that human lives can be redeemed if only there is energy and love enough to do it.

And while she was thinking thus she came upon the gate where James Garth usually took his mournful station ; and found him standing there in the old attitude, his chin resting on his hands, staring down on the fields that had been his father's,

but would never be his son's. He was so wrapped up in his own thoughts, that he neither saw nor heard her, though she said "Good-day, Mr. Garth," cheerily.

Had he still been the proprietor of Long Field Farm, she might have called him Garth, simply. As a ruined man she was careful to give the little note of respect.

As he did not hear he did not answer her; and then she drew down into the gateway and touched his arm. He started and muttered a savage oath; but when he saw who it was, he dropped his eyes, and touching his battered cap said, mildly enough:

"Beg pardon, miss, I did not know it was you."

"I thought you were coming to the Hollies again to finish that bit of garden you left half done," said Patricia, not as an opening by way of improving the occasion, but simply because she thought he had been coming; and she wanted to see the bit which the Fletchers had taken in from the field finished and made into the rose-garden they said should be called after her—"Patricia's portion."

"I have no heart for work!" said Garth more sadly than sullenly, turning away.

"Oh! don't say that!" she cried with a kind of

grieved surprise in her voice; "what is life good for if we do not work!"

"Life is good for nothing now to me," he answered.

"I cannot bear to hear you say so; is that like a man?" she said very earnestly, leaning forward and looking into his face. "Why, Mr. Garth! I should have thought you would have had more courage than this!"

"It has taken the heart out of me," he said; and put his head down into his hands with the old despairing gesture.

"But surely the very good of trial is to prove our strength!" Patricia answered. "What would become of the world if we all gave way like cowards as soon as things went wrong! And we can be cowardly in mind as well as in body."

"I am no coward, miss!" said Garth, lifting up his angry face.

The word caught and stung him, not unwholesomely.

"No, I dare say you are not; I should not think you were," Patricia answered; "at least not in the usual way. But whatever you may be in one way, you cannot say that this kind of thing is either brave or manly! It does no good. It will not

give you back your farm—and even if it would, all this gloomy despair would not be a worthy kind of purchase-money ; as it is, it only makes you more miserable than you need be, and adds to your poor wife's troubles."

"It is well for a young lady like you to talk," said James Garth with some scorn. "A soft young lady as has never known a cross nor a strain, how can you judge for a man like myself with such a sorrow as I have on me?"

"Have I known no sorrows?" answered Patricia in a low voice. "I think I have; and very bitter ones too! I have lost all that you have, Mr. Garth—my old home where I was brought up, and where I was so happy; my uncle who was like my father and that I loved like my father; my only friend; and—more;" she added with a flushing face: "more than I can tell you. And I too, nearly broke down as you have done, but—" with the old Joan of Arc look in her bright young eyes lifted up so straight and earnest into the sullen face beside her, "I made a better fight of it than you have! I am only a girl and you are a man—a man with a wife and children depending on you—but I would have cut off my right hand before I would have wasted my time and strength and neglected every duty as

you have done, just to give way to all this useless regret! It is unworthy of you; and however angry you may be to hear me say so, I feel as if I must!"

"You are a bold speaker, miss," said Garth with a dark look.

Once the sunny temper of him would have been no more ruffled by a woman's words than his flesh would have been hurt by a child's blow; but he was easily made angry now—and for the moment looked, as he felt, like a murderer.

Patricia shrank back at his eyes; then she seemed to nerve herself, and held out her hand.

"Forgive me if I have spoken too roughly," she said with a noble self-surrender, as if she had been speaking to a king. "But I am so sorry to see you so broken—I do so long to know that you have taken your griefs into your own hands, and conquered them as a brave man should, that perhaps I have said too much! You are doing yourself so much harm too, in every way, and making us all so unhappy! I want you to forgive me now if I have hurt you, but to try and be braver than you have been, all the same. You *must* come out of this trouble, Mr. Garth!—you must be a man and conquer it!"

She spoke passionately, with a pleading look and

manner that could not fail to touch any one, not a madman nor a savage. It is the power that truth and love possess ; the faith which at times removes more than the material mountain.

There was silence for some moments, he looking down, she looking at him.

"Perhaps you mean well, miss," he then said with a deep sigh, and turned away his head.

Whether he would or no he was touched ; but he did not want to yield to her. He had not taken her proffered hand when she held it out to him, now she put it into his, and clasped her fingers over the rough brown skin.

"I do mean it well," she said with a fervent ring in her voice. "Show me that you believe I do, and that you are not angry at my speaking so plainly—for after all you are so much older than I—by coming to-morrow to the Hollies. If you would only take up work again, Mr. Garth, you would conquer everything—live it all down !"

"Wages for working on another man's property are not pleasant to a man who has been his own master, and held his own land all his life, and his father's before him," said Garth.

"But if you have not got your land any longer, wages are better than nothing, and work on any

man's property is better than no work at all," said Patricia with a deeper wisdom than perhaps she knew. "Do come to the Hollies, Mr. Garth! you know that Doctor and Miss Fletcher are as much interested in you as if you were their brother. I cannot tell how you have distressed them by the way in which you have borne your trouble, so unlike what might have been expected from you!"

She was still speaking with the same passion of earnestness; pleading with the man's better self and judgment against his lower state; her hand in his, her fingers pressed close in her zeal. She looked like some girl-saint preaching the truth to unconverted ears, calling the darker soul into the higher life. As indeed she was; and as James Garth felt her to be.

Her courage and enthusiasm touched the dying spark of manhood in him; her woman's zeal woke up his pride; her frank friendliness lifted him back to his old state of self-respect, and seemed to heal the wound in his sore soul; the warm girlish grasp did him good, as he told his wife; and looking at her with his hollow eyes kindly, a smile came over his gaunt face and he said, shaking her hand:

"I'll come to-morrow, miss; I'd scarce be a man

if I could refuse a young lady like you who speaks so well ! ”

And as they stood there, with the warmth of the moment on them both—she to save and he to yield—the clatter of horses came near, and Lord Merrian, riding with a fair pretty girl, passed them at a slow pace and took in the whole scene.

They had never met since that last interview in the drawing-room at Abbey Holme ; and when they did meet now all things were changed. Patricia was no longer the possible co-heiress with Dora Drummond ; no longer Mrs. Hamley’s beautiful niece who was worth even a young lord’s looking after ; but a discarded relative, evidently living in disgrace and as evidently having done something to deserve it. And Lord Merrian was no longer the enthusiastic Numa worshipping his hidden Egeria, but the wise and far-seeing young statesman who had just ideas on the value of matrimonial alliances, and who had come to the rather tardy possession of his senses and the knowledge that a Lady Maud, born in the purple and educated in the shibboleth of the aristocracy from the beginning, would make a fitter wife for him than even a Joan of Arc who was a heretic to the inner creed, and not quite up in the accidence of the outer observances.



Lady Maud was a good, well-behaved, placid young person, untroubled by doubt social or religious, and who would have condemned an original thought, either in herself or any other woman, as dangerous and unladylike. She was one of those who accept the present arrangements of society as final, and who cannot understand what people find to perplex and discompose them. There are the Queen and royal family; the aristocracy; the two sections of the middle classes, both the moneyed who may be known and the professional and poor who may not; and then there are the common people who have to work for all these grander creatures, and who are not of the same human nature somehow, neither living nor suffering nor yet feeling as the high people, and who are so horribly vulgar and dirty! And then there is the Christian religion, which is the only religion in the world; all the rest being shocking idolatries destitute of the first principles of morality; and the English Church, which is the only true centre of Christianity, every other embodiment being so absurd that the wonder is how people can be found to believe them; and what can folks find in all this to make them unhappy or discontented? Things are as they were ordered from the beginning; the England and English society

of this our nineteenth century being the very perfection of God's counsels; and people are very wicked who try to change the established order. To be sure a few acts of Parliament may be passed that just touch an unimportant law, but nothing more. As for these dreadful doctrines of liberty and all that, Lady Maud thought they ought to be put a stop to and done something with. She believed they were all murderers in heart who held them; and could not understand any woman, still less a lady, with such awful opinions. Nevertheless, Philistine as she was, she was a good little girl who would make a faithful wife and a tolerably efficient mother; who would give *recherché* dinners to ambassadors and royal princes, and would regulate her household with discretion. She had a fair understanding, and was by no means dull to talk to if you kept in the shallows; but she was lost on all subjects wanting thought, being utterly devoid of philosophic instincts, and never seeing the cause or the outfall of any emotion whatsoever. She was immensely popular in society, being pretty, accomplished, amiable, and with perfect manners; and when she caught Lord Merrian's heart at the rebound, and made it her own, the world congratulated him on his good luck and told him he had chosen the very girl made for him. So

they were engaged with much rejoicing on all sides, and the young lord himself felt that he had chosen the better part.

As they rode along the lane, however, his head would run on Patricia to-day. She seemed very near to him, with a strange surge of memory that distressed him; for he was honest-hearted, and did not want to have his allegiance to the lady of his choice disturbed even by a memory. He was quite content with his pretty fiancée, and had no wish to look up into heights impossible for her to reach. Still, his Egeria had been very dear to him! She had been like his good angel—the voice which had called to him from above, and to which he had replied *Excelsior*—before he failed and fell.

He was a little silent as they rode between the leafy hedges. His imagination, always his strongest or his weakest point, had invested Patricia with even more than her rightful share of charm and beauty; and just now she seemed to come before his eyes like some glorified creature, half angelic, half heroic, who would have compelled crowds to kneel to her had she appeared and spoken.

Then they passed the Long Field gate, and he saw a tall, rather badly-dressed girl, with her hat pushed unbecomingly off her face, standing holding a

peasant's hand in hers and speaking to him as equals together; speaking to him with the same love, the same passion, the same fervour as she used to show when speaking to him, Lord Merrian, a gentleman and the son of a peer.

He took off his hat as he passed and Patricia bowed too; but the spell was broken. Henceforth Lady Maud had no need to fear the past. There would be no rival in his memory to dwarf her mental stature and pale her spiritual charms. He acknowledged his folly and the blindness of his fascination. That kind of thing would never have done! It is all very well to talk of brotherhood and equality and helping on humanity and all that: it is a beautiful theory, and one that warms one's heart when speaking of it. But when you come to its practical confession, standing thus shaking hands with a dirty, unwashed, unshaven peasant—Lord Merrian's blue blood asserted itself then with an indignant throb; and Patricia fell for ever from her pedestal. She was simply a handsome girl with rather low tastes and an inferior kind of manner; and he wondered, like a child suddenly conscious that its coveted plaything was a snake and would have stung him, what they should all have done had she taken him at his word, and

become Lady Merrian and his mother's daughter-in-law. What a mercy she did not! And as he thought this he looked at Lady Maud with as much gratitude as love, and closed the Kemball episode for ever.

Soon after this the Fletchers drove up, and Patricia got into the carriage with them; but not before she had made Garth promise again that he would come to-morrow to finish his work in the garden, and not before she had poured still a little more life and courage into the poor fellow's sunken heart.

"What an extraordinary thing, that girl to whom you bowed, shaking hands with that common man!" said Lady Maud after a long pause.

Lord Merrian looked innocent.

"That is Miss Kemball," he said; "niece of the people who live there," pointing with his whip to Abbey Holme. "She is an enthusiast, and goes in for communism and all that!"

"And you know her!" Lady Maud's face had just a shade of possible displeasure athwart its surprise. "She is not quite in your style I should think," with a nervous little laugh.

"No, she is not; but of course I know her slightly," was his answer, made with a reassuring

indifference and a wise suppression of the identity of Egeria.

"I cannot bear to see women go out of their sphere in this manner," said Lady Maud. "I think all these theories and extravagance perfectly awful. The idea of any one holding the position of a lady being so familiar as that with a common man! I wonder how she could!"

"Yes, it is odd to what lengths enthusiasm will carry people," said Lord Merrian simply; and turned the conversation by a master-stroke.

## CHAPTER IX.

HAMLEY, M.P.

THE whole country was in a fever of excitement.

A fête was to be given at the Quest, surpassing in magnificence anything that had ever been done before even in that lordly domain; and the world of Milltown stood still to watch the proceedings. All the visitable people of the locality were of course invited, and there was to be a large gathering of notabilities from London as well as of magnates from county places. A popular novelist who went into society for his raw material, and looked on a dinner as copy and a ball as a dozen pages written to his hand and only needing to be transcribed; a handsome young poet of high renown who made love to married women and celebrated them afterwards in verse; a sprinkling of able editors, modern Joves whose thunder-bolts tell, and whom the great ones of the earth are fain to court as the kings of

the fourth estate; and a couple of distinguished artists who lived like princes and with them—represented the aristocracy of talent beside whose glories, in the minds of some, stars grow dim and garters and ribbons are of no more value than so many yards of coloured tape. But indeed, all sorts and conditions of men were represented at this fête; and even the industrial had his envoy in the person of a rich cotton-spinner who had bought for a hundred pounds his foreman's invention for the better winding of thread, and who, by saving fractions of farthings on the reels, had rolled up millions of pounds as the gross results.

But among all these favoured guests bidden to see the show and swell the court of the local royalties, one house was passed over; and the Hamleys of Abbey Holme were not invited.

It was an impolitic omission; and no one knew exactly how it came to pass. When things turned ill in consequence the Countess threw the blame on the house steward; not ashamed, proud woman though she was, to make her subordinate suffer for her own deed. On his side the steward swore that her ladyship had run her pen through the name when she went over the list; and that he was bound to obey a sign as much as a word.



"A signal's an order," he said; and his hearers agreed with him that it was.

As no commission of inquiry was appointed, and the private visiting-list of the Quest was not submitted to official inspection, the thing passed as an inadvertence, regrettable but by no means to be apologised for, even when the consequences became evident a week or so later, and the mistake in policy fructified so disastrously.

By whose fault however it might have been that it came to pass, my lady's or the steward's, the fact was undeniable; the Hamleys were not invited to the fête, and the whole country knew of the slight. It was delightful to Colonel Lowe. It rejoiced his spirits like his morning cordial brewed of double strength, and stood for so much per centage off that terrible mortgage money which had to be paid else Cragfoot must pass from his hands like a dissolving view. It reconciled him for a moment to his hard fate in being obliged to do without the cakes he had already eaten, and to pay for the pipers to whom he had danced. It was a day worth living for, he said to his son, to see that old shoe-black slapped in the face as he deserved, and he hoped he should live to see him slapped on the other cheek before he had done with him.

"I should like to see him a beggar at my door," he said; "and I would not give him a crust to keep him from starving."

To which Sydney answered in the manner of a rebuke; "There is no good in wishing impossibilities; but cannot some one put a bullet through his head?"

"Easily, my boy, if no hemp was handy," laughed the colonel unpleasantly.

"By Jove! the old Italian society knew what it was about; and a hired bravo is a useful kind of scavenger after all," said Sydney.

"He cleared off the vermin," answered his father, "when all other means had failed," significantly; and Sydney's thoughts went back from James Garth, whom in his heart he cursed for cowardice, to Julia Manley to whom that day at the fête he had determined to propose. There was no help for it. It was bigamy sure enough, or would be, and bigamy was a felony; but murder would have even more unpleasant consequences, and between the two he took credit to himself for choosing the minor crime. He had not chosen without long deliberation, many qualms, and a few angry tears; but he had chosen now, and so must make the best of it and go through to the end.

This slight stung the Hamleys deeply. It was too evident to be concealed, and no varnish could gloss it over. It hurt the master of Abbey Holme in his most sensitive part—his recognised social position; and even when he went about explaining to every one that the reason of it was—his wife's niece had refused the offer of Lord Merrian's hand—he did himself no good and mended matters not a whit. For the mischief of it was no one believed him, and a few said the Quest people should really take it up and prosecute him for libel. It was impossible that a girl in her senses, and without prospects to be called prospects, should have refused the heir to an earldom; and just as impossible that she should have had the chance. Lord Merrian might have trifled with her; they saw nothing to condemn in that, for was not he a viscount and Patricia Kemball a comparative nobody?—and her vanity might have taken as serious attentions which he meant as just so much amusement; but he never made her an offer, they said with an incredulous intonation. It was not in the nature of things, and some one told untruths. It was just one of that conceited fellow's brags, said Colonel Lowe; or the girl's own falsehood which had imposed on him.

Thus, though Mr. Hamley talked of it everywhere,

Patricia's lofty action gave them but a very barren kind of honour at the best. To be able to boast of a brilliant offer of marriage refused by a wrong-headed young person—his wife's niece—who had absurd ideas about loyalty, when half the world doubted the statement, was a poor exchange for the actual recognition of an invitation ; and so the master of Abbey Holme felt. He was not a business man, accustomed to weigh the comparative values of investments, for nothing ; and he understood as well as most the worth of a fact over that of a word. The word melted into air, but the fact stood like granite.

Mr. Hamley was scarcely a Christian of the kind to receive an affront and forbear to pay it back. On the contrary, he upheld the doctrine of an eye for an eye as the soundest ever preached, and boasted that he had always given tit for tat in his life ; a method of proceeding quite in harmony with the fluent good nature of the man when not ruffled nor thwarted. He was in no wise minded now that "the Dovedales" should escape their tit ; they had to have it, he said, and he meant to give it them, hot and strong. If he could not make them serviceable friends he would be their formidable foe ; and as they declined to give him a hand up the ladder, he would teach them what it was to have a saw rasping their own rungs. They

wanted Lord Merrian to represent the borough, did they? and my lady had canvassed him when she thought he would be of use, had she? She seemed to have forgotten that now, but he had not; and when the next election came, as it would, a fortnight hence, they would find the course my young lord was to walk over pretty hotly contested, and in all probability the peer would lose what the parvenu would win. He had the most money to jingle in the ears of the free and enlightened; and, ballot or no ballot, local influence tells and votes are marketable all the same as before.

So Mr. Hamley set to work at once on the plan of his campaign; and soon all Milltown was on fire again with the news this time that Ledbury's successful office-boy was going to contest the borough with Lord Merrian; and every one said he would win. He had large local influence, and he represented the self-made. Though a swell now of appalling magnitude, had he not known hunger in his day, and been ragged and barefooted? The working classes held a kind of vested right in him in their own minds, and regarded him as a flower from their root, a crystal from their clay. And beside these there were the people who disbelieve in youth and prefer maturity without any reference to

the intrinsic quality of either—people who would rather trust the bag to a bearded Judas than to a boy-saint with a woman's face, and to whom Mr. Hamley, as a man having experience, was to be infinitely preferred to a raw lad who had not even a wife to help him.

The game was by no means desperate. Indeed it looked marvellously hopeful; and the Countess repented herself afresh that she had listened to pique rather than prudence, and been more instinctive than politic.

"Spite never pays," she thought ruefully; "it would have been better if I had asked them and kept that monster in good humour."

With all this encouragement the monster had fierce opponents as well; none fiercer than Colonel Lowe, who made the vote a personal matter, and resented it as an insult offered to himself if yellow was worn and not blue; and none more influential in his quiet way than Dr. Fletcher. Between an impressionable young soul full of fluid convictions, and a cast-iron mind welded through and through into wrong ones, he thought there was more chance of good from the former. Lord Merrian would probably drift into the wrong lobby on some divisions, but then he would go into the right one on

others; but Mr. Hamley would be invariably wrong. If the one had everything to learn, and most of all a central idea round which his theories of life might crystallize, the chances were even between learning good and evil; but what was to be hoped from a man who had adopted finality, and perfected his views on every point, yet who had spelt all his lessons backward and learnt nothing of life but the religion of success? Wherefore, though the bustle and insincerity of an election time were not much in Henry Fletcher's way, he consented to be one of Lord Merrian's committee, not because he affected him warmly but because he wished to keep out the other. And this more than ever widened the breach between the Hollies and Abbey Holme, and gave increased tangibility to Mr. Hamley's wrath.

The campaign, though short, was sharp.

Mr. Hamley stood on the high Tory interest. He despised as trumpery palterings with great questions all the boneless liberal-conservatism of young England, he said when he addressed the free and enlightened on his nomination, and was required to give the text of his convictions. To blow hot and cold was not his motto, and whatever he was he was Thorough. The altar and the throne; our glorious institutions and our national flag;

England the home of the free, and the knavish tricks of socialists and reds confounded by the high good sense of the people—that was his platform—let those find a better who could! The people's heart was good, their judgment was sound. They knew where their best interests were to be found—in the union of all classes, not in class division. They would vote then, for the man who understood them best, who had been one of them, and whose success was as much an honour to them as to himself. They would vote for him rather than for the young gentleman who had no definite policy to offer them, who knew nothing of the great questions he was setting himself forward to decide, and who would be simply so much material for clever whips and unscrupulous ministers. To elect that young gentleman would be to confide their interests into the keeping of hands that could not hold them, to steer by a weathercock that veered with every breath. As for the third candidate, who had been sent down at the last moment as a feeler by the republicans, he, Mr. Hamley, being a law-abiding man did *not* recommend the horse-pond, but he supposed the men of Milltown would have more self-respect than to choose for their representative a friend of petroleum and the Communists; a wretch



who would deluge the fair face of England with blood, and who would leave neither religion nor morality nor yet property standing.

His speeches and addresses which were written for him were effective; his showy presence also had its own value; his ready tongue, his definite views, all as positive and final as the multiplication table, pleased many; his money did more; and his uncompromising toryism, which yet bade for the working man as integral to imperial greatness, did most of all. Milltown was conservative to the backbone; and though Lord Merrian carried many of the gentry and the more independent thinkers with him, his admixture of philosophic liberalism gave Mr. Hamley just the advantage which won the day. The radical candidate of course was nowhere. He had been sent down merely as a gauge, and his exit from the town was ignominious.

Thus the game was lost and won in spite of Colonel Lowe and Henry Fletcher; and Mr. Hamley's name came out at the head of the poll, beating my lord by some scores.

It was a proud day for him. Jabez Hamley, M.P. It was a glorious rubber in the game of bowls that had begun between him and the Quest since that memorable day of omission! Jabez Hamley, M.P.,

and my young lord with the influence of his name, his earldom in the distance, and the flag flying from the Quest like royalty itself at home, defeated. Who says that the working man has not the power of station and riches in his hand if he chooses! Good sense, energy, and will—and here you see him, the richest landed proprietor of Milltown, and M.P. for the borough!

The man's self-congratulations were inexhaustible, and even his closest adherents were weary of them. He was as if possessed by a peripatetic demon of pride and elation, and neither street nor road was free from him. Wherever you went you met Mr. Hamley, florid, condescending, self-satisfied; with his head held high and his shoulders set square; his radiant humour shining out all over him like a sun; inexhaustible in talk of the election, and what he did, and how he had beaten my lord by pluck and energy and right views; and how splendidly his fellows had fought for him, and how ill my lord had managed everything—yes, even with my lady the countess, and the young person he was to marry all over the shop with their fair speeches and more tangible bribes. But pluck and energy—"Oh! that eternal pluck and energy!" said Mr. Borrodaile sarcastically, after he had listened with

smiling politeness to a full hour's declamation on the Hamley qualities as interpreted by the Hamley intellect.

Hamley, M.P.

He wrote the name as many times as a love-sick school-girl writes her lover's and her own. He spent all his quiet time in devising a proper flourish, one that would replace the ordinary scroll he had elaborated up to this time, and that should be like an ornamental fence-work about the cherished initials. He gave Dora a new bracelet on the occasion, with "From Hamley, M.P.," engraved in bossed and fanciful letters that looked like flowers about his photograph, which formed the centre ornament; and he bought his wife a diamond ring, which he presented to her with a set speech that pleased the poor lady whom long habit had rendered less critical than of old. It was a speech in the worst possible taste, and would have set her teeth on edge in former days; but now she smiled in her frosty way, and said "Thanks, Mr. Hamley, you are very kind, and I like this token of your success." And she was, as she said, really gratified by his gift.

Thus the Hamley sun shone bright and warm, and there was not a shadow anywhere save one—

Patricia Kembball, and the breach existing between her and them.

As for the "cut with the Dovedales," as Mr. Hamley phrased it, he regarded that now as a providential ordering — providence being on his side. Had they asked him to the fête he would have still been their humble servant, and would have worked for Lord Merrian for the wages of their social patronage; but having cast him off they had made a free man of him, and an M.P. to follow. No, there was not a shadow anywhere; and even Patricia Kembball was but as a mote in the sunbeam of really no importance. When Mrs. Hamley dropped her niece would be wiped off the slate as though she had never been. He had no kind of ill-feeling to her; quite the contrary; but she had been a mistake, and Mr. Hamley was too keen a man of business to cherish mistakes. Things that begin with bother end with loss he always said, and Patricia Kembball was no exception to the rule. Wherefore he looked to her aunt's decease as the sponge over the slate where her name stood; when he would have no more to do with her. What else might remain rested in his own mind only.

## CHAPTER X.

### WHAT MILLTOWN SAID.

**I**F Mr. Hamley could afford to be philosophic and magnanimous about that "uncomfortable young person," as he called Patricia, society was less patient. After the excitement too of the fête and the election, and the odd rumours that were afloat concerning many things and people, Milltown wanted something special, in which to interest itself, as a kind of aftermath of gossip. So it fastened on the extraordinary state of things existing between the Hollies and Abbey Holme, and made it a personal matter as to which was right and which was wrong ; the two sides quarrelling fiercely together. The fact was people could not make it out, and were angry in consequence. Why had she so suddenly left her aunt's house, they said, speaking of Patricia, and taken up her abode with an unmarried man of no nearer kinship than Adam ? Some said it was

infamous in Mrs. Hamley to allow it, and others said it was shameless in the young lady to do it. To be sure, Henry Fletcher was an old fogey, and there was a sister to stand sponsor for the girl to Mrs. Grundy; but it was a very odd position all the same. And when people talk about an odd position they mean something wrong in the background. If it is a woman who is athwart the lines, her false perspective is sure to be accounted to her as a sin; and no one could persuade the Abbey Holmeites that Patricia was not a good-for-nothing young baggage who had done something abominable for which she had been justly turned out of doors. But what a wicked thing of those Fletchers to take her in and countenance her as they did! It was just like them! Look at the servants they had—that Mary Anne, quite an improper girl; and Alice Garth, who had been dismissed from Abbey Holme at a moment's notice; and now Miss Kemball! It seemed as if a woman need only go wrong and be disgraceful to ensure their patronage and friendship; and it was really shameful.

So the Abbey Holmeites stormed, and the partisans of the Hollies, being few and feeble, were for the most part discomfited, having only vague charity to

go upon for their defence. And this never does much good in a local slander.

Mr. Wells too had been a little incautious, and had hinted at some things and told others. He was as much in the dark as everybody else as to the truth of that forgery, and he did not believe that the young lady had done it herself. But he had no clue to her accomplice; and at all events it was too strange a secret to keep entirely to himself. People are for the most part generous with strange secrets and like to share their wealth with their neighbours, and Mr. Wells was no exception to the rule; though he was a good, inoffensive soul who picked up caterpillars and small frogs from the dusty roads and put them into the moist banks, when taking his evening rambles, and was otherwise meek and benevolent. Still, he told more than he should about that hundred-pound cheque, and he hinted more than he told. Whence it came to pass that Patricia's name got more and more into the public mouth, and that people were beginning to regard her as a scandal to the place. A society so eminently respectable as that of Milltown does not like its young ladies to be talked of. Ever on the look-out for causes of offence, and ever in the mood to imagine what it does not find, it punishes the victims it creates. As it had chosen

Patricia for its present victim it assumed that she must have been guilty of something bad because she was being talked about. It is a circular kind of logic common to narrow communities; and the Milltown community was very narrow.

At last some one took heart and spoke to Miss Fletcher seriously, warning her against her guest affectionately, as is the way with people when they have put on their armour of unrighteousness and mean mischief. It was the rector's wife, Mrs. Borrodaile—chosen spokeswoman by the rest on account of her official position which gave a reflected sanctity to her warnings—who came one day to the Hollies and begged to see Miss Fletcher alone. She hoped she did not offend in her zeal, she said; but was she quite satisfied with her young friend?—quite sure that she was all she seemed to be, and as simple and good as she had once represented her? Strange reports were going about the town concerning her. There was some disgraceful mystery connected with the Bank and a cheque of which she, Mrs. Borrodaile, had not full particulars; but it was something very dreadful, and she knew quite enough to make her uneasy. She was a very odd young person too she had heard in opinion; and was quite a freethinker and all that; with queer notions about



morality, and the most objectionable habits—a very unsatisfactory young person indeed, and one to beware of.

So the good lady sat and talked, and stabbed a young creature's fair fame with the best intentions in the world ; thinking she was performing the part of a Christian minister's wife as it should be performed, and feeling satisfied that her matronly purity and propriety were justly incensed against youthful iniquity.

Catherine Fletcher smiled while Mrs. Borrodaile spoke ; and her smile, though genial and pleasant, was not reassuring.

"Yes, I know all the story," she said ; which was a long shot measured by facts ; "and I know that Miss Kemball was used most shamefully in that transaction—used in a double sense," she added meaningly. "You can tell me nothing new about it, Mrs. Borrodaile."

"And you are satisfied you know the truth ?" asked that lady emphatically. "I am very fond of young people, as you know, dear Miss Fletcher ; but I am bound to say that my experience of girls is unfavourable. They are generally untruthful, and I would not trust one of them."

"I, on the contrary, would trust most of them

greatly, and Patricia Kemball entirely," said Catherine.

"I call that simply offering a premium to deceit," Mrs. Borrodaile answered.

She was a woman who held fast to the doctrine of inherent depravity, and considered trust in one's fellow-creatures an heretical doctrine to be discouraged like Wesleyanism or Socinianism, or any other objectionable weed in the garden of orthodoxy.

"I think if you knew Patricia you would not say this," was Miss Fletcher's answer. "I never knew so lovely a character, so beautiful a nature."

"It is very odd," said Mrs. Borrodaile cringing her lips. "If she is so charming as you represent, how was it that she could not get on with Mrs. Hamley? I am sure a more correct-minded woman never breathed than dear Mrs. Hamley; and we can judge for ourselves of her kindness by the way in which she has brought up Miss Drummond—a no nearer connection than her husband's cousin! If Miss Kemball was really so sweet, I wonder she did not manage to make things pleasanter for herself at Abbey Holme than by all accounts they were."

"If they were unpleasant, of which I have no

doubt, that does not prove that the fault was Patricia's," said Miss Fletcher.

"Of course it proves nothing; but the supposition would be that it was. And at all events it is pleasanter to believe in one's old friends, people too of mature age, rather than in a young stranger of whom one knows nothing."

"I think it is pleasanter to believe in the truth," said Catherine simply, and Mrs. Borrodaile bridled.

"Well," she said rising, "it is of course no business of mine. I merely thought it my duty to warn you, and to let you know that the most unpleasant reports are going about the place in connection with Miss Kemball. This horrid Bank affair for one—her ungovernable temper, so that her poor aunt could not possibly put up with her for another—her loose opinions, so shocking in a young person!—and then this ridiculous assertion that Lord Merrian made her an offer of marriage, which she refused."

"I hear so little gossip I had not heard that before," said Catherine.

"Not that Lord Merrian proposed?" cried Mrs. Borrodaile shrilly.

"No; not a syllable of it."

"Why all Milltown is ringing with it."

"Who says so?"

"Every one."

"But who first set the report afloat, I mean? Patricia did not, I am sure."

"Oh! I believe Mr. Hamley first mentioned it. I wonder you never heard it, Miss Fletcher! He told Mr. Borrodaile before the fête came off—so long ago as that; and said that this was the reason why Abbey Holme had been excluded from the list of invitations. So I suppose it is true. At least, Miss Kemball must have made them believe it." This was said with a little natural feminine spite; for Mrs. Borrodaile had nailed her colours to the mast now, and was determined to find Patricia faulty on one count if not on another.

"You may see how little she boasts by her not telling me, her nearest friend, that she had had such a flattering offer," said Catherine. "She never gave me the faintest hint of anything of the kind; so she did not plume herself very much on her conquest."

"You might say instead how insincere she is not to have confided in you; but I see that you are infatuated, Miss Fletcher, and no good is to be done with you. However, I have performed my duty," was Mrs. Borrodaile's rejoinder, as she shook hands

indignantly, more than ever annoyed with Patricia as the innocent cause of her rebuff.

Had Catherine Fletcher been more skilful—say as skilful as Dora—she would have done Patricia more good. She would have agreed with Mrs. Borrodaile up to a certain point, by which she would have asserted her own sympathy and won her informant's respect. This would have put the envoy of Milltown morality into good humour, because people like to be successful in their work whatever it may be—private slander or public benefaction. Then, by a cleverly-dropped word here and a kindly suggestion there, she would have modified some of the harsher tints, softened some of the broader lines. And Mrs. Borrodaile would have adopted her suggestions, thinking them her own original impulses of charitable judgment. Thus she would have seemed to hold with the righteousness of matronly indignation while sweetening its sour doctrine of youthful iniquity ; but this kind of thing was as little in Catherine's way as Patricia's. By which she too failed in her possibilities in a society which cares mainly to be flattered and which dislikes to be taught. This two-faced faculty which the world calls tact, is that wherein the children of the generation are stronger than the

children of light, and wiser in the way of work-a-day policy.

Without a line of deception in her whole character, Patricia was yet not a girl to talk of herself, or to tell the facts of her life unasked. She had but few to tell, indeed. Her uncle's death, her engagement with Gordon, and her refusal of Lord Merrian, were the three most important items in her inventory; but as she had never been asked about the last she had not spoken of it. It would have seemed to her dishonourable had she done so. Of Gordon she had often talked; but naturally; with none of the shyness, the blushing consciousness, which betrays the girl's love-affair. Had he been her brother she could not have spoken of him with more open affectionateness, more confessed pride. It was this very openness which threw her friends off the track; so that it never occurred even to Catherine, who had the woman's keen scent in such matters, that her child, as she called Patricia, was engaged in the formal manner recognised by the world. And Henry Fletcher, who had heard the name of Gordon Frere even less frequently than his sister, suspected less in proportion.

The evening of Mrs. Borrodaile's visit the three were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner,

when Catherine, looking up from her book, said somewhat suddenly ; " Patricia, Mrs. Borrodaile has been telling me the oddest story about you to-day ! I wonder if it is true ? "

There were never any secrets at the Hollies ; so that Catherine's speaking out before her brother was neither a breach of confidence nor an embarrassment.

" A story about me ? What can it be ? " said Patricia, meeting the kind smile with one as frank.

" It is about Lord Merrian. "

A sudden flush that made her face flame to the tips of her ears was Patricia's first answer ; her second, in words, was the natural inquiry ; " What did she say ? "

" That Mr. Hamley has been telling every one the reason why they were not invited at the Quest, when that fête was given, was because Lord Merrian had made you an offer, and you had refused him. "

" I think Mr. Hamley ought to hold his tongue, " said Patricia indignantly.

Dr. Fletcher looked at her narrowly. He was arranging a microscopic slide, but he spoilt his object and had to begin again.

" Then it is true ? "

"Yes," said Patricia. "But I think it very dishonourable of Mr. Hamley to speak about it."

"You refused Lord Merrian! It was a brave thing to do, child!" cried Catherine warmly, her mind taking in at a glance the whole situation, with the pressure that must have been brought to bear on her.

"I could do nothing else," the girl answered; "I did not love him; besides, how could I, with Gordon?"

Dr. Fletcher put down his hands.

"What has Gordon to do with it?" asked Catherine opening her soft brown eyes.

"Everything," Patricia answered with grave simplicity. "Uncle gave me to him the night before he died."

There was a pause of a few moments.

"I did not know you were engaged," then said Catherine, to whom the information had come rather as a shock.

"No? I thought you did. I have spoken of him so often I thought you knew everything," Patricia answered.

"Not so much as I do now," said Catherine glancing at her brother. "I had no idea that our country lassie had been a potential countess, or that we were some day to lose her."



"Oh, as for losing me, you will not do that for a long time!" said Patricia innocently. "Gordon will not come home for another year at the earliest—perhaps not for five. It all depends on the Admiralty; and no one ever knows what their orders will be." She looked up wistfully. "The time seems long when I think of it," she added. "I should so like to see him again! But it does no good to grumble, and I would rather he did his duty to the service if I did not see him for twenty years, than shirk his work and come home to me."

"That's the right spirit, dear love," said Catherine. "Is it not, Henry?"

"Surely," said Dr. Fletcher rather slowly.

He had taken no part in the conversation; but this was not extraordinary. He was a silent man by nature, and it amused him to hear his sister and her young friend talk, as they did, every evening on all sorts of subjects, while he sat by, generally occupied with his microscope and listening to what they said in between his graver observations and the notes made thereon. But though he was silent, he had become very pale during these last sentences; a kind of greyness had stolen over his face that startled his sister when she looked at him. It was only a change of colour and expression. His

manner was the same as ever, quiet, tranquil, self-possessed. And when he called Patricia to come and see the little shell he had at last fixed for her conveniently, not the keenest watcher could have detected a shade of difference in his tone or bearing. Unless indeed, it had been that he was more tender to her than usual.

So the evening passed, and the conversation after a time drifted into other topics; but not before Patricia, the ice being now broken, gave as circumstantial an account of all matters as she could, which showed the springs of Mrs. Hamley's conduct in a clearer light, if not a fairer. To have been implicated in a crime of which she would not betray the real offender, and to have refused a viscount, were both together reasons sufficiently strong to account for any amount of reprobation from a woman of her nature; and neither Catherine nor her brother wondered now at Mrs. Hamley's practical desertion of her niece—"a loss by which we have made our gain," said Demeter lovingly, when Patricia had gone to bed.

And Henry Fletcher assented and said, "yes, indeed," without looking up from his work. How that evening's conversation affected him, or if it affected him at all, no one ever knew; not even

Catherine, his confidante and favourite friend. He was not of the kind to wear his heart on his sleeve for daw or dove ; nor yet of the kind to nourish impossible desires or unavailing regrets. Whether he had hoped that Patricia Kemball would have remained with them for ever as their daughter and delight, or whether he had hoped for a still nearer and dearer love, who can say ? And was it only a coincidence, the degradation of health which followed so soon on this conversation ? No one knew.

All that any one could say or see was that Dr. Fletcher was looking very ill, and had grown quite an old man lately. His hair was greyer, his leathery brown face more marked and puckered, his mild, kind eyes more mournful than of old ; and these had always been his characteristics. But as he did not complain no one took much heed of him. They supposed he had been poisoning himself with some of his abominable chemicals, or chilling his poor thin blood by star-gazing when he ought to be in bed and asleep, like a rational Christian gentleman. And if he was ill he had brought it on himself, they concluded ; so shut up their hoard of compassion for some better occasion—such as poor Colonel Lowe's embarrassments which Mr. Hamley took care should now be public property, and the

pity it would be if Cragfoot was obliged to be sold. For though Milltown was content to have a self-made Colossus bestriding their town, it did not quite like to see the huge splay foot set down on one of their real gentry. That huge splay foot might crush the Garths of humanity, as many as it would, but society itself was interested in the Nemesis overtaking a spendthrift born in the local purple. Society was just now full of poor Colonel Lowe whose house was tumbling about his ears; so that between him and Patricia Kemball the Milltown hoppers were full fed with grist, and tea-party tongues wagged merrily.

They wagged still more when it became known that young Sydney was engaged to Miss Manley, who had a hundred thousand pounds at least for her fortune; and they all said it was the most barefaced thing of its kind they had ever known. In this perhaps, they were not so far out; for the fact of an unpersonable young woman with a large fortune being demanded in marriage by a man of somewhat mildewed name, when the ruin of his house had just been made public, carries a doubtful look with it somehow, and seems to justify unfriendly comment.

Not that either father or son cared for what was

said of them, so long as they touched the material advantages for which they sold themselves. When, years ago, Colonel Lowe had married Lady Anne Graham's daughter, and had married her without settlements and against the wishes of her clearer-sighted friends, the world had made pretty free with the gallant young officer's assumed motives; but the Colonel came in for the Cragfoot estate, and let the world play at ninepins with his motives as it liked. And now when his son was treading in his steps the same kind of disfavour was repeated. They only hoped however, that Miss Manley would be advised by those who knew, and have her fortune settled on herself. She had warning enough in her poor mother-in-law that was to be, they said, who had married in that irrational trust which possesses weak and loving women. The handsome young officer full of fervour and very much in debt, with a halo of Crimean glory round his curly head, was more to be believed, she thought, than her staid old tiresome friends who drew gloomy pictures, and wanted to have no end of legal straps and backstays. She did not accept their gloomy pictures as in any way applicable to her. Men had married for money and ill-treated their wives afterwards, she acknowledged; of course

they had; and would again; but Charles was an exception; and it was absurd, she argued, to give herself to a man she could not trust with her property. In giving herself she entrusted him with something far more precious than Cragfoot; so the two might well go together, and the estate follow her happiness. Wherefore the marriage was celebrated according to their joint wishes; and Lady Anne Graham's well-endowed daughter gave herself in haste and had repented for a lifetime at leisure.

And now the same thing was going to be repeated with Sydney and Julia Manley in that odd way in which events double themselves in certain families. Miss Manley was as much in love with the son as Miss Graham had been with the father, and the ravens of ill-boding croaked their ugly prophecies in vain. She only desired to show her lover how much she believed in him and loved him; and the resolve of a weak woman for love or spite is for the most part unalterable.

Milltown was all agog with the news; but aghast too; for poor Miss Manley was liked well enough in the place, and Sydney was, as we know, distrusted.

Mr. Hamley came home one evening full of the report. He waited until he had drunk his prescribed

amount of claret before joining the ladies, and then he began.

"Well, Dora, that precious lover of yours has not been long before he has given you a successor," he said, planting himself on the hearthrug, and speaking with a kind of contemptuous jocularly, which was not his most becoming manner.

"What *do* you mean, Mr. Hamley?" answered Dora innocently.

"That precious scamp, that young Lowe, has engaged himself to Miss Manley; and the fool is going to marry him."

"Indeed!" cried Dora, who just then dropped her book and had to stoop rather a long time before she could pick it up again.

"Yes, I think it is, indeed! when such shamelessness takes place before one's eyes. He has taken her for her money, that's as plain as the nose on one's face; and that's why he wanted you," was Mr. Hamley's answer.

"You are not very complimentary, Mr. Hamley," said his wife. "I had no more wish that Dora should be his wife than you had, but I would not say so rudely as you do that he wanted her only for her dower. Dora and Julia Manley are not very much alike, I think!"

"You dear!" purred Dora. "You are always so good to me! But Miss Manley is a great deal better than I am, and perhaps Sy—, Mr. Lowe, does really like her."

Let those explain the contradictions of human nature who can. Dora did not want to go away with Sydney, and she was sorry for his distresses; she did not want to share his poverty, nor indeed did she wish him to be poor at all; she repented her own marriage with him; she was even ashamed of it now that the first excitement had worn off and she had realised the difficulties and dangers of her position; yet with all this, when she heard that Sydney Lowe was really engaged to Julia Manley, she was almost choked, partly with rage and partly with tears, and could scarcely command herself to speak in her usual tone and manner. Nothing but the deadly fear of discovery, with Mr. Hamley's small keen eyes watching her so narrowly, could have nerved her for her part; but power comes when it is needed, as it came to her now in calmness and self-control.

"I grant all that, Lady," Mr. Hamley answered. "I am not fool enough to place such a cart-horse as that Manley woman and our little Arab here in the same harness; but it looks fishy all the same——"



"It looks what, Mr. Hamley?" interrupted the slow, severe voice of the wifely critic.

He laughed, and shifted his feet noisily.

"A lapse, Lady, a lapse," he said. "Well, then, it looks doubtful when a young man pretends to be broken-hearted for Dora one day and makes up to Miss Manley the next. It looks more like money-bags than love, I must say. For my part," with an assumption of patriarchal experience, "I cannot understand the young fellows of the present day. I am a man as doesn't change myself, either in my admiration for the ladies, or in my sentiments elsewhere. The lady as I have loved once I should for always, and I don't understand this game of skipjack—one down and another up before you can say Jack Robinson. I think that's the way to do, isn't it, Lady?"

He spoke to his wife but he looked at Dora; and Mrs. Hamley smiled and said yes, she approved of his fidelity. It was one of the virtues she always had admired in him, and she hoped she should have reason to admire it to the end.

Not much more was said at the time of this projected marriage, and Dora escaped the detection of her secret with her usual cleverness; but when Patricia heard of it, she startled the Fletchers by a

curious outburst of anguish and terror, which they had some difficulty in calming. She would not say why the news so powerfully affected her ; not even to Catherine, from whom she had not a thought unshared. She only looked white and scared, and said, "No, no, it ought not to be," and "it must not be," weeping hot, heavy tears, and falling back again into her old position of self-torture—not knowing whether to tell what we know and so prevent further evil, is the right thing to do, or to keep silence in the presence of sin, and by silence to consent with sinners, may not be at times the truest good. Catherine comforted her as well as she was able, but she could not console her entirely ; for, to which side soever she turned, she found grief and perplexity and one form of moral evil. Do what she would she could not keep herself pure nor hold her action harmless.

While she was sitting there doing her best to face her difficulties bravely, the Hamley carriage dashed up to the door, and a note was brought in to her from Mr. Hamley desiring her instant presence at Abbey Holme : Mrs. Hamley was ill. Had it then come at last ? Patricia thought, as with trembling hands she threw on her hat and jacket. Had her aunt discovered the whole thing, and was she to be

assoiled and reinstated?—taken back to favour, and perhaps taken back to the house? She would be glad of the former; but the latter?

As she turned to go she threw her arms round Catherine with a feverish grasp.

“Whatever happens we are always friends together, as we are now?” she whispered. “You will not give me back to them?”

“No,” said Catherine kissing her fondly; “you shall not go back to Abbey Holme, my love, save at your own desire.”

“Then that will be never!” cried Patricia with a shudder, as she got into the carriage and was borne away—borne away to this house of falsehood and fair-seeming, where nothing was as it looked, and where evil was accepted for good and deception for truth.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LAST LOOK.

**M**RS. HAMLEY'S health had long been declining.

She was one of those lean and ascetic women who, with a *cordon bleu* in the kitchen and all sorts of cometic vintages in the cellar, eat dry toast for breakfast and drink plain water for dinner. She gave one the impression of being only half nourished and always insufficiently clad ; a woman to whom the senses were things accursed, and who kept her luxurious table and wore her magnificent clothes as matters due to her position rather than as personal indulgences in which she took pleasure-obligations for the pride of life, not delights for the lust of the flesh.

This last year had tried her severely. Ever since Patricia's arrival she had been more or less disturbed in mind, and her frail body had suffered in consequence. The last three weeks had put the

coping-stone to her troubles. That her niece should be implicated in a crime which she refused to confess, that she should have thrust aside the providential settlement offered to her, and lastly, that she should have preferred the Hollies to Abbey Holme, and Catherine and Henry Fletcher to herself and her husband—all this was too much for her. Add to this the excitement consequent on her husband's election; the breakfasts she had to give, the luncheons, the dinners, at which she must preside; the uproar and confusion introduced into her well-ordered household; the bodily fatigue and mental excitement she had to undergo; and it was small wonder if, lying awake all night and fretting all day, now resenting Patricia's absence from their unusual festivities, now resenting those festivities themselves, exhausted and feverish, her health went down as Mr. Hamley said "with a run." Her scanty bit of dry toast grew smaller at each breakfast, her temper more uncertain. She was evidently very ill and profoundly wretched; but she would not allow them to send for Dr. Wickham, nor would she recall Patricia. She would own to nothing but fatigue and the east wind; and had it not been for dear Dora, she used to say, she did not know how she should have survived either.

Dear Dora was everything to her. In truth, the girl was sorry to see her suffer, and desperately frightened lest she should die. Her death would indeed be shooting Niagara, with that terrible "and after?" to follow. She was perfectly aware of the contingency it included; indeed she had known it for years; and though she had encouraged it when it suited her purpose, the knowledge of what had to come when Mrs. Hamley's death should leave Mr. Hamley free, had perhaps had something to do with the ceremony in which Mr. Sydney Lowe had been the principal performer more than a year ago behind the New Road caryatides. But though Mrs. Hamley's death would always have been a terror and a trouble, it was doubly so now when Sydney's engagement with Miss Manley was made public, and she could not claim even such slight protection as a confession of her love for him might have given. Would she have had courage for that, had she been able? Look where she would the waters were closing rapidly round her, and she saw no way of escape to the right or to the left.

Dear Dora was intensely unhappy at this time; terrified and distracted; and her own secret sorrows gave her such a delightful appearance of sympathy—as much from an instinct of self-preservation

as from her natural amiability she attended on Mrs. Hamley with such unremitting care, so deliciously unobtrusive yet so full of thought and charming management—that, with the propensity there is in human nature to round off characters harmoniously and to find velvet coats without seamy sides, no one who had seen her at this time would have believed that a girl, so sweet and full of thought for her dying friend, was able at the same time to be so false and base.

Day by day Mrs. Hamley had grown worse and drawn nearer and nearer to the Great Hour. She had no perceptible ailment that could be catalogued. Weakness, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, frequent faintings, a gradual decay—that long slow death of which the stages are so many before the last is reached, and passed—these were the symptoms and the root of her malady. There was nothing special to combat in all this. The machine was wearing out; that was all; and she knew it. She had a tough spirit and had always made a good fight of it. In poverty of circumstances as in distress of mind she never showed what she suffered, save by increased acerbity of temper. She was peevish in affliction, but she was grim and determined. Even now she had not given up till forced to do so. She

had come down punctually to breakfast, and read the prayers in her quavering treble, though she was obliged to yield so far to her weakness as to sit during the office. She had poured out the tea to the last with her frail and shaking hands that could scarcely lift the massive silver pot, both together ; and she had had her poor old face and head dressed with her usual care and precision. It was painful to see the unnecessary struggle that she made. If only she would have consented to her state, and been a comfortable unpowdered and unsightly goody wrapped up in flannel without beads or bugles, lace or ribbons about her, how much better it would have been, dear Dora used to think ; while she said sweetly, to please her ; “ What a pretty cap that is, dear ! Bignold certainly knows how to make caps.”

At which Mrs. Hamley would smile complacently, and think she was masking her batteries and fading cleverly.

And all this time she was fretting about Patricia. Too proud to yield to her inward wish for a reconciliation, or to write telling her to come and see her, she was angry that the girl whom she had repulsed so severely did not again beg for grace, divining the moment when it would be granted.



"She must know that I am ill," she used to think, half between tears and anger. "My own flesh and blood—my only relation to whom I have been so kind, a very mother—to treat me with such ingratitude, such heartlessness! It is her evil conscience. She knows that she has sinned, and she is ashamed and afraid to see me."

So she thought, lying awake during the long watches of the night, tossed between her secret consciousness of Patricia's innocence and her determination to find her guilty for her own self-justification; growing weaker day by day; more harassed night by night; till at last the moment came when her will had to go down before disease, and when she must perforce keep the bed from which she could not rise.

Then, and not till then, she desired that Patricia should be sent for; she not having heard of her illness, and to whom Mr. Hamley's hurried note: "Miss Kemball, return with the carriage if you please; Mrs. Hamley is ill and desires to see you," was scarcely sufficient preparation for the terrible change she found.

Propped up in bed, her hair restorers, pads and braids, laid aside with her smart dress-caps, and her scanty whitened locks pushed off from her pinched and sallow face; her eyes sunk in her head; her

thin lips, black and dry, drawn back from her teeth; her body wasted; and her hands idly plucking at the sheet—Patricia, suddenly ushered into the presence of her aunt—into the presence of death—could not at first realise what she saw. It was like something unreal; a picture, or a dream. She could scarcely believe that that formidable power of whom she had been so often afraid should be lying there, a poor weak helpless thing appealing only to human pity and dependent on compassion for every act of her life; her arbitrary will set aside; her autocratic power gone; nothing left now but the bare bones of humanity. It was very terrible to her; a sudden reversion of conditions—she so strong, and her aunt who had mastered her so weak—that made her feel almost cruel and undutiful.

She could not repress a grievous little cry as she came up to the bed, and took the wasted hand that moved feebly across the sheet towards her, saying as she carried it to her lips, "I did not know that you were ill, darling aunty; no one told me till this moment."

"I thought you might have come to see me, Patricia," said Mrs. Hamley with feeble reproach.

"If I had only known that I might, I would not have waited to be sent for," she answered tenderly.

The dying woman looked up.

"In spite then, of your wickedness, you feel that you owe me some respect?" she said.

Had she been in her ordinary state her severity of accent would have chilled and checked Patricia; now her assumption of moral superiority was almost tragical from its impotence.

"I only wanted to love you with my whole heart. Oh, let me hear you say that you believe me!" Patricia said earnestly, her honest eyes full of tears.

"I dare say you did," Mrs. Hamley answered after a pause; "I did not see it, but I am willing to believe it—now."

"I never meant to offend you, aunty dear, at any time. I have been ignorant and clumsy, I know; but I always wished to do what was right," said the girl kissing her hand.

"But you did what was wrong instead," Mrs. Hamley answered, looking up with that strange and awful death-bed scowl which seems more like demoniacal possession than human anger.

Patricia shivered as she met her look, and shut her eyes for an instant; then, as if she put it from her, she said:

"Yet indeed I tried hard to satisfy you, dear, though I failed."

"Yes, you failed—you failed," repeated Mrs. Hamley, half closing her eyes.

"I know I did, to my bitter sorrow ; and I never understood how nor why," returned Patricia, bending over her with an earnest caressing gesture, as if she would have taken the poor sick head to her bosom, and given some of the fulness of her own life to the fast-ebbing stream pulsing each moment more faintly in those shrivelled veins.

"If you are sincere in saying that, tell me the truth about the cheque," cried Mrs. Hamley suddenly, with a quick flaming up of her old angry tenacity.

Patricia looked across the bed to where Dora stood, distressed truly, but self-possessed and fully alive to the danger of the moment. She had not braved all the perils which had surrounded her for so many months to yield now to an impulse of weak compassion or puerile conscience. She was sorry for both Mrs. Hamley and Patricia, but she would be more sorry for herself if things were different. Hard as it was on both that the one should die deceived, and the other be condemned while innocent, it would be harder she thought, on herself, if the mask which she had worn with such success should be taken off now at the last moment, and the labour of a life be undone.

"Dora, help me!" cried Patricia in an imploring tone.

Dora looked at her steadily.

"I cannot help you, Patricia," she answered. "I know nothing about it—you know that I do not," emphatically.

Patricia covered her face. It took all her strength and loyalty to stand up against the agony of this moment, to bear this terrible burden. That her aunt should die believing this grievous falsehood true, believing Dora pure, and ignorant of the awful chapter of further crime contemplated and announced, was of itself sorrow enough for a sincere nature; but also, unselfish as she was, it did seem hard that she should be forced to sacrifice the appearance of honour—the thing which was dearest to her in life—for the reality, in maintaining the false repute of another.

The dying woman plucked her feebly by the sleeve.

"Tell me," she said. "Why do you trouble Dora about it?"

Patricia lifted up her face, pale, quivering, but steadfast.

"I cannot tell you, aunt," she said in low distinct tones. "I have promised faithfully that I never

would, and I have not got leave to break my word. Only believe that I was innocent in the whole matter—oh believe that, dear, for it is true!”

Her aunt gave a pathetic little sigh. She was too weary, too weak to combat longer. She must resign herself to defeat. Undutiful and self-willed even at this supreme moment, she must leave that stubborn spirit now to its own hard course. She had done all she could; and life was fading too fast for struggle.

She turned her wan eyes to Dora. It was rest to her to look at the soft flower-face she knew so well and loved so dearly!—the face that had been, to her fancy and belief, like an open book of which she had read every page from end to end! It was her haven, her comfort; and yet, with the natural sense of family, she regretted even in this her last hour that her own niece had not been as dear and good as her husband's cousin, and had not been able to at least share in the love she gave so freely to this.

“God bless you, my child!” she said in the gasping, interrupted utterance of the dying. “You have been my comfort ever since you entered the house. You have made me happy.”

“I have loved you, dear,” said Dora, laying her soft hand on the fleshless fingers.

Mrs. Hamley smiled faintly. "Take care of her, Mr. Hamley," she said; for Mr. Hamley had just entered by a side door, and now stood by Dora.

"I will, my dear—I will," he answered fervently, and put his arm round his young cousin's slight figure, drawing her close up to his ample chest.

"She deserves your fatherly care," said Mrs. Hamley. "I leave her to you. God bless her! God bless you, Dora!"

Dora sobbed, and Mr. Hamley pressed her to him tenderly. Tears were in his eyes too. The woman who was dying there before him had been his true friend, if never his beloved. Though she was leaving the way open for the happiness he had waited for so patiently and defended so jealously, still she had been staunch and loyal in her day. And then his very tenderness for Dora made him pitiful for his wife, just as his natural emotion for her death made him yet more loving to Dora.

"Don't fret, my darling, I will take care of you," he said in a low voice.

Mrs. Hamley looked pleased.

"Right," she whispered. "Be her father—take care of her."

"Have you no word for me, aunt?" cried

Patricia with the passionate cry of the Esau unjustly defrauded. "Bless me too!"

There was a pause. Mrs. Hamley looked at her niece wearily, sternly, sadly.

"God forgive you, and turn your stubborn heart. I forgive you," was then her feeble response made with an effort; and again her eyes turned to Dora. "God bless you, my Dora!" she murmured.

No other word was spoken. The evening sun streamed into the room and showed the pallid face of the dying woman; Patricia's silent agony, yet clear of self-reproach; the grief, the fear, but the self-control that comes of the very need of terror, of Dora; the subdued and decent regret of Mr. Hamley, divided as he was between pity and love, regret and relief. The silence was broken only by the harsh rattle of the labouring breath growing harder, slower, at every instant; by the stifled sobs of the onlookers gathered there to watch but unable to help; when suddenly Mrs. Hamley opened her eyes. It seemed as if she saw something beautiful in the air before her, for a smile, softer and more divine than had ever been on her face before, irradiated her whole countenance. She half raised herself from her pillow, turning towards Patricia. The last spark of life blazed up in her eyes with a



sudden vividness that burnt more like fire than human life. She could not speak, though her dry lips moved; but her look fastened itself on the girl with a yearning and intense desire, a passionate longing that was as mournful as a cry.

Patricia stooped over her and took the half-raised body in her arms.

"What is it, dear?" she said. "Do you know me now?"

The face that looked into hers was scarcely Aunt Hamley's face at all: it was that of a creature divinely illumined, brightened with more than human knowledge, burning with more than human love. It lasted only for a moment; but that moment seemed an eternity, during which her very soul had looked from her eyes into Patricia's. Then her head sank back on the girl's arm, her glazed eyes turned, her jaw dropped, her laboured breathing ceased; and she was dead. But she died in her niece's arms and her last look had been hers.

Patricia laid her head reverently on the pillow, and with a strange superstitious feeling kissed her mouth for the faint lingering breath that might be about her lips.

Mr. Hamley stretched out his large hand and closed her eyelids.

"Thus die the just," he said with pompous solemnity; while Dora drew a deep breath as one who has safely skirted by a danger, though the next instant she slightly shivered, knowing what was before her.

To Patricia the world felt wider and darker somehow now than it had done this morning. Her last relative had gone, and she remembered with a pang of self-reproach—how base it seemed!—her terror lest her aunt should send for her to live at Abbey Holme again, and once more plunge her into the old life of misunderstanding and "consenting with sinners." If it could have brought her back again how willingly she would have returned to the stifling air and unwholesome morals of Abbey Holme! If her own sorrow could have ensured that poor dead soul's peace, how gladly she would have paid the price! But the door was closed and the seal set for all time now; and as the past had been so must it remain for eternity. She could only hope that what had been wrong here was made right there; but for this world all was over.

Yet it was cruel. Dora blessed and loved and thanked, and Dora the cause of it all! Dora who had lived a life of deception from the first, who had simply offered a manner for a reality, a facile temper

for a heart, and falsehood for truth ; and she who had failed—she scarcely knew why, but surely not for want of trying to succeed by faithful endeavour—yet she was simply forgiven and Dora was blessed ! She wished her aunt had blessed her too. She was glad of that strange loving look ; it seemed to soften the hardness of the last word, and lessen its injustice ; but she wished that she had blessed her ! She had not forfeited this holy consecration of death ; she had been loyal to her promise, but in her loyalty she had not injured her aunt, and she had done nothing to make her unworthy of her blessing. It had been a less sorrow to believe her, Patricia, guilty of some mysterious misdemeanour than it would have been to have known Dora's life of deception and falsehood. She saw no different way of action for herself had she her time to come over again ; unless indeed she had suspected Dora from the beginning, and refused to do the service asked of her. But still her thoughts went back to the central point of her sorrow at this moment ; she wished that her aunt had blessed her—that she had spoken just one comfortable word of love and trust before the time for speech had passed for ever !

Presently Mr. Hamley spoke.

"Your dear aunt has died forgiving you," he said to Patricia, his arm still about Dora; "so do I."

He held out his hand over the bed, and Patricia, waking up from her dreamy thoughts, put hers into it. It was like a compact across the dead.

"Thank you," she said simply.

She knew he meant well, and she accepted his meaning in lieu of the right. They shook hands solemnly; after which Patricia stooped down and lovingly kissed the white still face on the pillow. Dora and Mr. Hamley kissed it too, both with a certain shudder; and then they all went down into the drawing-room, when Patricia prepared to go.

"Must you leave now?" said Mr. Hamley, meaning to be kind. "If you must you must; but remember that Dora will always be your friend,"

He said this as if he had offered her a coronet.

Patricia did not answer. She looked at Dora hurriedly, not wishing to draw suspicion on her, and indeed on her own account not caring to look at her longer or more narrowly than was absolutely necessary.

The fair downward-bended face had a look on it of such abject terror overmastering it for a moment, as humiliated Patricia to see. How would she act now? Dora thought. Her silence during Mrs.

Hamley's lifetime had been always sure, but she did not feel so certain of it now. There was this marriage with Miss Manley publicly talked about: would she keep her counsel faithfully even through this? But what of the future? When she too had heard that word which had to come, what would she do? Would she lift up her voice and cry aloud, and, to prevent the commission of a sin, tell all she knew, and so dash her former friend headlong to destruction? or would she still keep loyal silence and consent with sin and sinners for the sake of truth? This was why she looked so terrified that it touched the braver heart with a sense of shame and shared humiliation to see it.

But Patricia was far from suspecting the truth of Mr. Hamley's feeling or Dora's cause for fear. She, like her aunt, had no other idea but that of a fatherly affection on his side and a filial love on hers; and as for Sydney Lowe, she supposed that now, Aunt Hamley being dead, Dora would come forward openly and prevent the illegal marriage of her husband by taking up her own publicly. She was sorry for her too, all things considered; and notwithstanding her own griefs against her would not have added a feather's weight to her troubles.

“ I hope you understand that it will be a good

thing for you to have Dora as your friend," Mr. Hamley went on to say. "Dora will have a large amount of power in her hands; she will be mistress of Abbey Holme, and you will want some one to stand by you. Dora will stand by you. I make bold to say so much. You make her your friend, and all will come out square."

"Thank you, but I shall not ask her for her help," said Patricia hastily.

Dora looked up, but over her head, not into her face. She avoided Patricia's eyes as she spoke.

"I will always be glad to help you, dear," she said sweetly. "You are *her* niece; and this kind, good friend," turning to Mr. Hamley and looking at him with shy affection and covert and most delightful consciousness, "this dear friend has always wished you well and been good to you. I can do nothing better than carry out his wishes."

"I do not know what you mean exactly," said Patricia with a certain stately bearing, drawing herself away. "I want no help of any kind, and what I want more than I have I can work for. The greatest good that you could have done me, Dora, before she died, you refused; I want nothing of you now!"

"You take high ground, Miss!" said Mr. Hamley with an annoyed air.

"I mean nothing offensive, but I can accept no favour at your hands, Mr. Hamley, nor at Dora's," said Patricia.

"You need not be afraid. Affairs will be properly conducted, and not the most particular-minded person, as I call it, will have a word to say," put in Mr. Hamley hastily.

He took it that she knew his heart and mind, and that she resented his intentions. And for a moment the thought flashed across him whether "that tale of Gordon Frere was all a bam, and had the girl taken a liking for himself? She had always been uncommon good to him, and more unlikely things had happened."

"I am sure you will do all that is right," answered Patricia, believing him to mean the funeral, or the disposition of his wife's property to Dora, or something else in the way of business, she did not know what; "but Dora knows quite well why I would not accept a favour from her, and why now that poor aunty has gone I have no place here and never shall have again."

"My goodness! Patricia, I know nothing of the kind! I have not the least idea of what you mean!" cried Dora roused to unusual energy of voice and temper by the imminence of her peril.

"Dora! how can you carry on this awful thing with what I know, and you know too, and with what we have just seen!" cried Patricia pressing her hands on her heart.

"What the dickens does the girl mean?" cried Mr. Hamley looking at her in a curiously embarrassed way.

If it was what he thought, her sentiments, though flattering and predisposing him to generous treatment and kindly judgment, were decidedly in the way at the present moment, and he wished her to understand as much.

"I have not the remotest idea," said Dora sternly. Then in a low voice she added, "Our poor dear thought her mad, and I do really believe she is."

"It looks like it," he answered in the same key.

He went up to Patricia, and took both her hands in his, speaking to her in that peculiar way in which people speak to maniacs—rather loud, in an artificial voice, every word staccato and distinct.

"Yes, yes, Dora knows all about it," he said wagging his head in a soothing manner. "Dora quite understands it all—you hear? she quite understands what you mean; so go home now like a good girl, and tell Miss Fletcher to put your feet in



hot water. It will draw the blood from your head. Bad thing, blood in the head, my dear," pointing to his own forehead with his forefinger; "hot foot-bath will do you good."

"I don't understand you," said Patricia looking at him in blank amazement. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Hamley rang the bell.

"Jones," he said when the man entered the room, "is the carriage waiting?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jones.

"Now my dear Miss Kemball, let me send you to your friends," said Mr. Hamley graciously. "Jones, tell Bignold to put on her bonnet and escort Miss Kemball to the Hollies. I do not like her to go alone; Mrs. Hamley did not like her to go alone," with a sudden sigh. "She might do herself a mischief," in a whisper to Dora.

And Dora answered, "Yes. It is better to send Bignold."

How lucky it was that she thought of making Patricia mad! Whatever she might say now Mr. Hamley would not believe her, and if she said too much she could easily get her locked up. Only the ravings of a diseased brain taking the false impression characteristic of disease and accusing those

who are the nearest and dearest of impossible crimes! It was a happy thought, and she was infinitely relieved by it; though indeed she was not cruel or hard by nature, only driven into both cruelty and hardness by fear and falsehood. And when she thought of getting Patricia locked up in a lunatic asylum if she told too much, she felt something like a person who is being fast surrounded by the tide, when he suddenly strikes on a pathway up the cliffs which he had not known nor foreseen, and whom it would but little discompose if he had to fling down' an unoffending sheep or lamb that stood in his way and made his escape else impossible.

Patricia at first refused both Bignold and the carriage; but when Mr. Hamley insisted so strongly that her refusal became contentious, she yielded, and suffered him to take her out to the door on his arm, as he had brought her in just about a year ago. As she passed through the hall she gave one sudden sob as if her heart would break; and Mr. Hamley patted her hand affectionately. The new idea that had taken possession of him was flattering, if inconvenient; and he felt that he could afford to be compassionate to the poor soul. Then they shook hands together, and he was really quite tender to her; so much so

that she wondered at it, and the servants wondered too; as he assisted her into the carriage, and so sent her back to the Hollies in state, and guarded. She little suspected however that the former maid was her present keeper, and that she was regarded by Mr. Hamley on the one hand as a lunatic, dangerous to leave alone, on the other as a poor dear unfortunate young woman who had contracted a not unnatural but wholly unreturnable affection for himself.

"And now," she said, after she had told her friends how her aunt had died—told them too with many tears of that strange earnest look, and how she seemed to feel in it that the poor darling had at the last moment recognised her innocence, and what a comfort it was that she had died actually in her arms—when all this was told, "and now," she said, "we must come to some understanding about myself. I did not mind staying here so long as poor aunt lived—somehow it did not seem like fastening myself on you, because, I suppose you could have sent me back at any hour when you were tired of me. But now it is different. I cannot live on you for ever; I must do something for myself."

"Nonsense!" said Henry Fletcher.

"Henry is right," said Catherine. "Besides my dear, to take up your own point, you cannot do anything that will keep you. No one who has not a specialised education can make a reasonable income; and so few women have a specialised education! You, my darling, certainly have not."

"But I can learn something," said Patricia a little vaguely.

"We must first of all arrange what you can learn, and what you can utilise when learnt," Catherine answered, as if arguing a possible point.

"You know how much I love you both," said Patricia tenderly, as she returned to the charge. "You know I came to you like your own child when I was in trouble; but how can I go on living here, perhaps for years, till Gordon comes home and is able to marry me? I am sure you must both feel it would be better and nobler to do something for myself."

"So it would, if we were not ourselves," Dr. Fletcher said. "If you were with any one else, I would counsel you to go out into the world and be industrious and independent; but not from us. We love you too well," he added, looking at her quietly.

"Patricia," said Catherine glancing at her

brother. "I am going to tell you something; something about myself that you have never heard. Henry knows it all, so it is nothing that will shock or startle him. Long before you were born, long before your father married, he and I were friends—the dearest friends! My darling, he was the only man I ever loved; and at one time he loved me. But then," she added hastily, "he had not seen your mother. Still, we were friends and lovers in earlier days, and but for a mere chance we should have been married. And does not that give me a certain claim to be your pro-mother now?"

Tears stood in her eyes, and the round, soft matronly cheek was pale while she spoke. A woman's heart never grows old, and the love which, by long years, has become a habit of remembrance and is no longer a present influence, has nevertheless always the same power to move her when spoken of. Catherine Fletcher's love had been very true and very deep. It had saddened her life for many a long day; and, for all that it was a thing of the past now, and she was entirely happy in her life, for all that she was a childless old maid and her only love had married and died so many years ago—she could never speak of him without tears. The habit of remembrance was the habit of sorrow

too; and deep down in her heart was that everlasting spring of grief which, however closely it might be covered up, would never run dry. Ah! the graves we all carry about with us! the sorrows that time only scars over and never heals!

"Then uncle knew it!" cried Patricia, as she suddenly remembered her uncle's look when Gordon was speaking of Mr. Fletcher the solicitor, and how he had mentioned "bonny Kate" so kindly.

"Yes, I have no doubt he did; what there was to know, which was not much," said Catherine. "He and your poor father were very fond of each other, and trusted each other entirely, though they were so different in character and your uncle so much the older of the two. But now I think the question is settled. You will look on me as a kind of step-mother, Patricia? They are not all as bad as the fairy-books make out. I think I have known one or two who have been faithful, and who have deserved the love they gained."

"Yes, you are my mother!" cried Patricia, throwing her arms round Catherine's neck with a passionate burst of self-surrender; "and I will be your daughter, now and for ever. This is home, it is not dependence!"

"Now you are a good girl and a wise one," said

Henry quietly; while Catherine, crying too, for the silly sympathy of tears to which even strong-hearted women yield, could only kiss the dear young face that was resting on her breast; and call her "daughter" and "dear child," while feeling as if she was holding Reginald with her in her arms,—while feeling as if *he* was there and knew what she felt, and loved her for what she was doing.

So that little hitch was got over satisfactorily. Patricia was formally adopted into the Hollies as the daughter of the house, and Dr. Fletcher was careful to call her "my sister's child" when he spoke of her—which was not often.

But Milltown, having a suspicious mind, was not quite certain whether it approved of the arrangement or not; and at all events it was quite sure that the Hollies was just the worst home that odd girl could have found, and that she, in her turn, was just the most undesirable kind of young person those foolish people could have adopted. And, good heavens! why did they want to adopt any one? These things always turn out badly, prophesied the malcontents; and the best wisdom in life is to accept the fewest responsibilities, and to interfere least with other folks' concerns.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FREE TO PLEAD.

**M**R. HAMLEY did the thing handsomely. If the Countess of Dovedale herself had died there could not have been a more splendid show of grief; perhaps there would not have been one so splendid. The shops put up their mourning shutters, and all the blinds of the private houses were drawn as the magnificent cortége, the best Milltown, helped by the county capital, could furnish—tramped slowly down the High Street to the intense enjoyment of a hundred peeping eyes. The two or three little fishing-boats lying in the harbour had streamers hoisted half-mast high—they had been sent down by order, and were scarlet and buff, the Hamley colours, with a black bar for mourning across; half the community were made mourners by the undertaker, and had hat-bands and scarves as symbols of their grief; and



on the Sunday following Mr. Borrodaile preached the funeral sermon, wherein he called the defunct Mrs. Hamley a mother in Israel, and said that at the last day the poor, who were her children, would rise up and call her blessed. Seeing that the practice of almsgiving was held in abhorrence at Abbey Holme, and that charitable contributions were condemned as bad political economy, this was taking rather more than the ordinary ecclesiastical license, which as a rule goes even beyond the poetic.

As for Mr. Hamley's private and personal emblems of woe they were of the most expressive and expansive kind. The crape on his hat did not leave a quarter of an inch of beaver to be seen; his jet studs and watch-chain were of the largest size and broadest and most florid pattern made; and his glossy black clothes seemed as if an extra dip in the dyeing-vat had been given to them. Dora's mourning was almost as deep as a widow's; save the characteristic cap indeed, it might have been a widow's. She looked very fair and interesting in her sables—"black always did become her," said Bignold, who had been promoted—black, just touched round the face with a narrow line of transparent white; and when she came into

church, leaning on Mr. Hamley's arm, she created quite a sensation by the unusual prettiness of her person and the presumed desolateness of her condition.

She was assumed to be so desolate, and Mr. Hamley's grief was taken to be so sincere, that Garth was heard to say bitterly; "He's had it out of the Psalms now, and God has cursed the unrighteous as He promised!"

After this Sunday there was a great deal of talk throughout Milltown about Dora. What would become of her no one could exactly determine. Of course she could not live at Abbey Holme with Mr. Hamley alone; and until he married again, which he was pretty sure to do, her case seemed a hard one, brought up as she had been and made so much fuss with, they said among themselves. A few wondered whether the great man would marry Dora herself; but for the most part they believed he would look higher than his cousin, and maybe plant his foot in the peerage this time. Besides, men don't generally take for their wives their own dependants whom they have seen grow up under their roofs from childhood. So it was settled by the majority that Dora would have to leave Abbey Holme, and that Mr. Hamley would marry some

grand lady of high degree and small possessions, and found the Hamley family at last.

Colonel Lowe, discussing the great event of the hour with his son, supposed for his part that Mr. Hamley would marry Dora. He could understand now the old shoeblack's policy, he said. He had loved the girl himself, and in all probability everything had been understood and arranged between them long ago; which was the secret of his refusal to give her a dowry when he, Sydney Lowe, had done her the honour to propose to her.

"Any one can see it with half an eye. It was clear as daylight to me at the time, as you must remember I hinted broadly enough to you," said the Colonel in his disdainful way. "These low-bred people have always their mysteries and intrigues on hand; and Syd, my boy, you are well out of that *galère*. You have made better terms for yourself by a long way, and chosen as a gentleman should."

This he said joyously, with his hand laid kindly on his son's shoulder, who looked sulky and by no means responsive. He had not seen Dora since his engagement with Julia Manley, and he dreaded though he longed to see her. He did not know how he could face her with such news as he had to

bring, but he thought she would understand the necessities of his position, and he did not want to lose her—in the future. He did warmly and honestly love her with such warmth and honesty as he possessed ; and though his love sprang from, and rested on, only the lowest stratum of a man's fancy and passion, still it was all he had to give ; and if gold cannot be got from brass, what qualities brass has in itself may at least be recognised.

Among the other qualities however, which this love of his possessed, jealousy was one of the strongest ; and when he heard his father speak of Dora's possibly belonging to Mr. Hamley, he felt as if he should go mad on the spot—mad enough to throw Julia and her thousands to the wind, confess everything, and take Dora away—into poverty if it must be—so long as it was into his own keeping before the world, safe from any other man's intrusion. But the habits of a lifetime, and the sordid aims of a selfish nature, were too strong for him. Poverty was Sydney Lowe's Apollyon whom he dared not fight and could not conquer ; and rather than meet this terrible demon, whom we of the nineteenth century dread more than all the others drawn up in line of battle together, he would consent to be perjured on his own account, and to give up the

woman he loved—and had married. He was essentially the child of the age; indifferent to everything but physical enjoyment and social well-being, and with no more belief in morals than he had in religion.

Provided a man is not found out, it does not much signify what he does, according to Sydney Lowe; and rather than be found out in a folly that would carry consequences, he would commit a crime for concealment. Money and position were his two gods of equal height and power; and to these everything in heaven and earth, in life and humanity, had to give way.

Not being able however, to bear his father's cynicism, and being as profoundly miserable as he could be—and if shallow, he was passionate—he dashed from the room, determined to see Dora at any cost, and to come to some definite understanding with her—his wife; his wife, married to another man! That he should destroy his own secret marriage was one thing, and in the circumstances in which he found himself quite allowable, if to be regretted; but that Dora should give herself and her smiles to Mr. Hamley—no! he could not stand by and see that done! She might commit a crime as well as himself, so far as the sin was concerned. It was not that which troubled him. But she should

not give him a rival; and the liberty he took for himself he would kill her before she should share.

While he was fuming at his unlucky position with all its detestable surroundings, cursing Julia, his father, Dora, Mr. Hamley, every one concerned but himself, Mr. Hamley at Abbey Holme was talking seriously to Dora.

It was Monday evening, the day after the funeral sermon which had closed the cycle of the burial solemnities. Everything was done now. Even the undertaker's bill was paid, as well as the bills for servants' mourning and liveries, the carriage trap-pings, and the like: by which Mr. Hamley got off a large discount for ready money. At home, everything characteristic of and belonging to Mrs. Hamley was put away. Her special little work-table had been placed like a shrine in a corner; her special chair removed; her pile of handsomely bound religious books was laid up in the library; and her whole personal property was made over unconditionally to Dora, with the exception of the few poor trinkets and ornaments she had possessed before her marriage. These were sent down to Patricia labelled "Family heirlooms," and accompanied by a note meant to be kind but worded with unconscious offensiveness, wherein Mr. Hamley conveyed these

precious deposits to her keeping as the last representative of the Kemball family; at the same time begging to enclose a sum of fifty pounds in token of respect for the dear departed whose niece she was, and to meet expenses incidental on the melancholy event. It was kindly thought if clumsily and pompously done; and Patricia had no idea she should hurt him as she did when she returned his fifty-pound note with thanks. But he was really hurt. The man's heart just then was softened, and he was more sensitive than he had ever been in his life before.

Well! the Kemball page of his life was turned down now for ever; and as he said, with a not undeserved sense of satisfaction, judging by his lights, it was a page of which he was not ashamed, and where he had done his duty like a man. But now he was free—the last word had been spelt out, the last line written. He had gone through his lesson triumphantly, and now his play-time had begun. He was free—free to plead, free to enjoy. The man had never looked so well, so near to a strain of nobleness as he did this evening when he came into the drawing-room after dinner, prepared to receive the crowning mercy of his life.

Dora was sitting in her accustomed place alone, dressed for dinner as usual; pretty, soft, amiable also

as usual ; but devoured by secret fear and anxiety, knowing exactly what was to come but not knowing how it would end.

When Mr. Hamley entered, and she met him with her pretty smile subdued to the proper melancholy tone of the moment, making a graceful, half-receptive movement of her head and hand as if welcoming him to her apartment—she saw her fate. She saw it in the man's white, moved face ; in the subtle change from master to wooer, from friend to lover which was in every line and movement, as he drew a chair close to her and in his turn motioned her to sit down. It was a queer, theatrical manner of meeting ; but it was the kind of thing that pleased him. All display did.

He came to plead. He came confident of the result, but timid too, as real love makes even strong men before they are assured. He came to pour out such wealth of affection as he possessed like hoarded treasures in her lap ; and Dora, looking up at him with her sweet, affectionate little face, and heart that seemed to stand still for dread, only wished that he might die—fall dead there at her feet—before he had got time to say what he had waited almost these ten years to say, and what she herself had made it a crime to hear.



He sat down beside her, and took her dainty hand in both his own.

"Dora," he said in a husky voice, so low and changed it scarcely sounded like his voice at all; "I have something to say to you."

"Yes," said Dora innocently.

Had she not had nerves of steel she would have shrieked aloud in her terror. As it was, she smiled tenderly, and looked with the sweetest friendliness, like a child or an angel by his side.

"It cannot be a matter of amazement to you what I have to say," began Mr. Hamley oratorically; but his grand manner ill accorded with his trembling hands and unsteady voice. "You must have discovered it for yourself that I love you—love you very dearly, I may say."

"You have always been the kindest of the kind to me," said Dora, lifting her eyes with her special look of shy girl's gratitude.

"I have tried to be so," he answered, "It was not difficult, feeling what I did for you. From the first moment when you came into the house, a pretty little girl, just budding as one may say, up to this hour when I have your hands in mine over my desolate hearth, I have loved you."

Dora gave his hand a little press, but said nothing.

"Year by year as you grew prettier and more and more the lady, I grew more to love you," he went on to say, drawing a deep breath. "But I do not think I ever took advantage of my position, or treated you with anything but the respect which I should naturally show a lady. You have been always the lady with me, Dora. I loved you—no man more; but I think I may claim to say that I did not show it to you rudely, or make the sainted soul who has just left us anxious or uneasy."

"You have been always very good to me," said Dora softly. "No one could have treated anyone with more kindness or generosity than you have treated me."

"I have wished to do so, Dora! I have wished to do so! But it has been hard work at times to control myself; and when other men came after you, it was a struggle then, I can tell you. Still, I did; and I am proud of myself that I did. At one time I was afraid of that young dog—that young Lowe."

Dora raised her pretty shoulders with a movement of disdain. "Oh!" she said, with a satirical little laugh.

"But you assured me it was not so, and I was content. I said to myself, Dora does not know my heart. Dora does not see that I love her—as a man and a husband I must control myself, and not let Dora know my great designs for her when the sainted soul shall be taken from us. If I could show myself to Dora, and let her understand me and the future I design for her, I should have no fear ; but as I cannot, I must do my best to keep her safe, and to save her from mere tuft-hunters, greedy of money, like that mean fellow Lowe. So I put it to you, Dora, as you may remember ; and I cannot tell you how you lightened my heart when you said you did not love him. Dora, you gave me new life that day !"

He said this with a burst of tenderness that nearly broke him down. It was pathetic in its own way to see the coarse, strong face of the man softened and quivering with emotion, to see his eyes turned with such tender longing on the fair drooping head beside him, his self-complacency absorbed in the intensity of his love for this girl who was fooling him. Whatever of pure and true and noble there was in Mr. Hamley's nature was all centred in his love for Dora—Dora, the wife of Sydney Lowe—the Rachel for whom he had waited so long, and

who had deceived him as she had deceived everyone else.

"And you do not love him?" continued Mr. Hamley in the tone of a question. He was sure of his answer, but he longed to hear it again. There are some things which never tire in repetition, and the assurance to a jealous man that he has no cause for jealousy is one of them.

She lifted her eyes to his face with her sudden swift look, dropping the lids immediately.

"Love him!" she said with the most enchanting contempt. "No!"

"And, Dora, you do love me? Let me hear you say so, darling! You have often told me so with those pretty eyes of yours; tell me so now in words," he pleaded. "I must hear you say it—'I love you!'"

"I love you!" replied Dora in a low voice. It was her task, and she must get through it in the best way she could. "Poor Syd!" she thought a little ruefully; which did not prevent her saying her prescribed formula in the most bewitching manner possible.

He caught her to his heart. Strong, conceited, arrogant as he was, at this moment he was nothing but the humble and enraptured lover whom a pair

of blue eyes and two red rosebud lips had transported into heaven.

"Now I have won all that I care for in life!" he said, smoothing her hair with a tremulous hand. "Dora as my wife puts the finishing touch to it all. Oh, Dora, you have made a happy man of me to-night! My darling, my pretty pet, my little queen, how happy I shall be! how happy I am!"

"You have made me happy too," said Dora from the breadth of his chest where her golden head was resting; "how shall I get out of this awful scrape!" being the unspoken commentary that ran side by side with her words.

He passed his large hand over her face. It was such a delicious luxury to him to feel that he had so far the right. He had, as he truly boasted, always treated her with self-restraint and respect, and the slackening of the curb was a joy so great he scarcely regretted the price of so many years' control he had paid for it.

"But we will keep it secret between ourselves, my dear," he said. "I should not like to do anything that would be offensive to that sainted soul's memory. She was a good wife to me, if a trifle crabbed and stiff, and I would not like people to say that I danced on her grave, or took my second

wife before my first was cold. We will keep all this to our two selves; and when the year is out we will be married quietly, you know, and without much of a spread. Don't you think I am right, Dora?"

"Certainly," she said. "No one must know!"

She said this quite warmly. It was a reprieve to her so far, and who knows what that reprieve might not bring forth? Mr. Hamley might die—he did not look very like it though; or Sydney might die; or Julia Manley; or a thousand things might happen which would set her feet free from their present fetters. Wherefore she assented with alacrity, and so gave Mr. Hamley cause to congratulate himself again on the possession of a prospective wife so full of nice feeling and so entirely the lady as dear Dora.

Furthermore it was agreed between them that Dora should sometimes visit friends, and sometimes live at Abbey Holme, where there should always be some married woman to be her chaperon and bear her countenance, as Mr. Hamley said; and that everything should be conducted in such a manner as to give no cause of scandal to a world only too ready to find cause.

"I must have my Dora's name kept as clean as

a new pin!" said Mr. Hamley with more poetry of feeling than of speech. "We both owe so much to the memory of the dear departed."

To which Dora, sighing with the most admirable imitation of melancholy, said, "Yes, we do," and was rewarded for her sweetness by a kiss.

So the evening passed, and there was not in all England a happier heart or a prouder man than Jabez Hamley, M.P., and the accepted lover of Dora. Not all the wealth of England could have won him from his present position. He had not a wish ungratified—not a care, not a cloud in his horizon anywhere. Accustomed to self-control and fond of display, it was no great trial to him to have that year of probation before he could call Dora really his own. He wanted the world to see how decorously he could mourn for the sainted soul who had just departed. He too, like Mrs. Hamley, knew that affection and harmony are the only things which render marriage respectable, and that one of open disunion is also one of open scandal. It would have been painful to him, and would have brushed the bloom from the flower of his happiness, had any one been able to suspect that he had, as he said, danced on his wife's grave, and taken a second before the first was cold. It was even an additional

pleasure to him that he was obliged to conceal his joy. It seemed to make it more entirely his own; and the secret which no one shared with him and Dora was so much the closer bond between them. Yes, he was thoroughly, divinely happy. He stood on the pinnacle, and asked no more of man or gods.

The next day he went down to Mr. Simpson's office.

"Simpson," he said in a melancholy voice, "I wish to add a codicil to my will."

Obsequious Simpson bowed. "Certainly, Mr. Hamley; certainly, sir," he said. "Your instructions?"

"Only a few words," said Mr. Hamley. "Absolute and unconditional bequeathment of all of which I may die possessed, in whatever form the property may consist, to my cousin, Dora Drummond."

Mr. Simpson was too wise to show any feeling, but he was profoundly astonished all the same. He was even more so when Mr. Hamley declared he would not leave the office till this codicil had been written, signed, witnessed, and delivered. The man's whole nature seemed changed. With his widower's sorrowful air was a certain abounding sense of inner joy that did not escape a man so astute as the Milltown lawyer; but he made no



comment further than that it was natural for Mr. Hamley to wish to ensure the well-being of his only relation; and that, wishing no ill to Miss Drummond, he yet hoped she would not profit by his generous disposition in her favour for many a long day yet to come, if indeed she ever did.

To all of which Mr. Hamley answered judiciously, and rode away with a light heart; feeling that should he meet with any accident, which however he did not expect, dear Dora would be fully provided for and would wear his memory in perpetual magnificence and sorrow. He wished though, that he had made a proviso against her marrying. In his lover-like haste to assure her good fortune he had not thought of that; but he felt it would be enough to make him turn in his grave, as people say, if Dora should marry on his money; and he was determined to repair the omission to-morrow. Taking time by the forelock was one of Mr. Hamley's principles as well as Colonel Lowe's; and to-morrow he would act on it.

Meanwhile he went home to what it pleased him to call out of doors his desolate hearth, where he found a superb little dinner, and a beautiful young woman in the most becoming dress possible to be constructed out of crape and bugles, waiting to receive

him with a mixture of open friendliness and secret bashfulness which seemed to him just the most fascinating mixture of manner any lady could evince.

This evening too, passed like the former, save that the softer tremulousness of the as yet unassured suitor had gone, and a certain fever of delight—a certain bounding, irrepressible, and enthusiastic joy—had taken its place. He could not go to bed; he could not sleep; and when Dora stole down the stairs in her old noiseless way, and went out into the garden to meet her husband, from whom she had had a peremptory letter to-day (she could receive private letters now), Mr. Hamley was in his own room thinking of her, and of all she had said and done to him to-night. She was like a fairy or an angel, he thought with a smile; and that fairy, that angel, loved him and was his!

“Where nothing is, but all things seem!” How much of life is real anywhere? Prosperity, happiness, truth, even love—what is actual, what only an appearance? More secrets lie behind the closed doors of hearts and homes than the world outside ever dreams of; and more men worship shadows and are made happy by pretences than ever come to the knowledge that they have been tricked.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SHADOW IN THE WOOD.

“SYD, it has come at last!” cried Dora as she ran into her husband’s arms in the shrubbery.

What had come? thought Sydney. Her knowledge of his intended marriage with Julia Manley? or had Mr. Hamley discovered all? or could it be that his father was right, and that this vulgar ruffian had dared to lift his eyes to the prize he had won?

“What has come, Dora?” he asked quickly.

“Mr. Hamley,” said Dora.

“What about Mr. Hamley?” repeated Sydney. “You speak in riddles to-night—do please be plain!”

Dora felt all the awkwardness of the confession she had to make; but as it must be done she had better get over the bad piece of road as quickly as possible. It was a curious position for a woman to have to tell her husband that she had pre-

tended—only pretended, mind!—she was going to be married to another man, even when that husband had announced his intention of marrying another woman!

“Mr. Hamley has proposed to me,” said Dora, clasping her hands in each other and resting them on his bended arm.

The moon was bright enough for her to see her husband’s eyes, and she did not like the look in them. She felt there was mischief behind them; and angry as she was with him she instinctively met it with a caress.

Caresses do a great deal with some men, and in general they did a great deal with Sydney Lowe. But though, when she looked as she looked now, she had hitherto always made his will her own, to-night she failed. Between love and jealousy the latter was the stronger of the two.

“And what did you say, Dora?” he asked, gripping her hands harshly.

“What *could* I say, dear?” she answered deprecatingly.

“I did not ask that. You could say a great many things. I asked, what did you say?” he repeated, still with his dead-white face and flaming eyes and dangerously calm manner.

Dora looked at him innocently.

"I said, yes, of course. What else was there for me to do?" she answered, arching her eyebrows.

With a savage oath he flung away the hands which until now he had been grasping, and lifted his arm as if to strike her. Had she shrunk or cowered, he would; but she stood her ground so quietly, and looked at him so prettily, that in a manner she unnerved him. She was desperately frightened nevertheless; but it would never do to let Sydney see that she was afraid of him, she thought. She must hold her own now or never, and make him understand that by his own iniquity he had made himself responsible for all that had come, or was to come. But if he did beat her, and make her black and blue—he looked capable of it—and Mr. Hamley saw the bruises, and asked her about them to-morrow, what should she say to him? Her difficulties were really very great. How she wished one of these two men would die! At this present moment she was quite indifferent which of the two, so long as she was free of one.

All these things she thought in the moment during which she stood with her hands clasped in

each other, her head a little bent, and her blue eyes looking up with the tenderest sweetness into Sydney's angry face.

"What nonsense, Syd!" she said, creeping up to him and taking hold of his arms. "How absurd of you to go on like this, dear! If I had not said yes, and pretended that I would, what would have become of me? He would have turned me then and there out of doors, and where could I have gone? Your father is ruined, and you cannot give me a home; besides it is all over the place that you are on the point of marrying Miss Manley, and I should like to know what I am to do!"

"Starve, rather than do such a shameful thing as this!" cried Sydney violently.

"Willingly, if you will starve with me," said pretty Dora amiably. "But I tell you, Syd, frankly, if you marry Julia Manley for money I will marry Mr. Hamley; so now you know."

"Dora, you are too detestable!" cried Sydney. "You seem to forget altogether that you are my wife."

"No I do not, dear," she answered. "I remember it too well; for it makes the whole thing so dreadfully complicated. If we had been only lovers all this time there would have been nothing

to be afraid of; but it will be a horribly awkward position for us both when you walk out of church with Miss Manley on your arm as your wife, and we go out to our bridal dinner-parties afterwards. We shall meet at some of them."

"Oh, Dora, do not say such awful things!" cried Sydney, fairly writhing under her words. "I always thought you had some kind of feeling, some kind of sympathy. You will send me wild if you go on like this!"

"Well, Syd, you are the most extraordinarily unreasonable person I have ever seen!" said Dora. "You first of all marry me under false pretences; then you discard me, and are going to marry somebody else; but you will neither hear it spoken of, nor let me secure myself from ruin. What *do* you propose? or have you anything to propose at all?"

"I have," cried Sydney.

"Well? what?"

He turned away. Sydney Lowe was not much troubled with conscientious scruples nor moral delicacy, but even he hesitated before he propounded the scheme he had devised, whereby he should take all the infamy on himself and make it unnecessary for Dora to imitate him.

"No, Syd," said Dora, when he had taken the

bad courage to speak, "I will not do that. We are in an awful scrape, but I don't think that would make it much better. At least not for me. It would be pleasant enough for you; but for myself—no, I don't see it, Syd!" quite gravely.

"And you prefer that low-lived ruffian, that big brute, to me?" cried Sydney, savagely.

"No, Syd, I don't. I loathe and hate Mr. Hamley, and you know that I do; and I love you, and you know that too. I have never loved any man but you, and never shall."

Her head went down on his breast, and his arms were round her dainty waist. His passion changed in an instant to despair, and his anger to a woman's grief.

"Oh, Dora, how can you leave me!" he sobbed. "It breaks my heart to think of it when it does not send me mad!"

"How can you leave me!" she retorted, also sobbing. "You are going to be married now at once; I only said I would, in a year's time, to keep things quiet and see what could be done. It is you, not I, who are the deserter."

"What else can I do, darling?" he pleaded. "We are ruined, all of us, unless we can get money, and I know of no other way than this."



This was the first time he had confessed to his intention ; and it brought the present frightful state of things very vividly before Dora. She turned away and shook herself free from his arms ; but if the movement was petulant she softened its harshness by sobbing vehemently. At that moment she hated Mr. Hamley and loved Sydney to distraction ; so she thought ; and would brave everything rather than give him up to Julia Manley and accept the bitter portion assigned to her on her own side. Her tears unmanned him more than ever. He clasped her to him again, frantically crying—

“Dora ! my wife ! my own little wife ! I cannot give you up ! Whatever happens, poverty or no poverty, let us keep together and make the best of things as we have them.”

“I will if you will,” said Dora, between her sobs ; and then they kissed each other and cried afresh, and were both profoundly and intensely miserable. They knew well enough that they could not face poverty, but none the more did they wish to part. Selfishness, deceit, recklessness, treachery, crime—all these lay heaped in burning flames on their young heads ; but all the same, utterly worthless as they were, they loved each other at the moment and they suffered. It soothed them to cry ; “Let us go

into ruin together, so long as we are together." It was a deception, born of love and despair. Each recognised the deception in that deeper reasonableness which passion never stirs in some people; but it was a sweet if passing solace, and each thought the other believed in it.

So they stood there in the shadow, clasped in each other's arms; Dora crying on Sydney's shoulder, and he crying over her golden head too, in between alternations of hope and misery, impossible suggestions, untenable promises, and sometimes blank confessions of necessities; feeling that the final moment had come, and that the calm counsel of the morning would show them the madness of the night, while both pretended that this madness was to last and to be acted on. More than once however, Sydney begged her to forgive him for the wrong he had done her so unintentionally in marrying her; assuring her—and here he spoke the truth—that he had no kind of knowledge of his father's affairs when he made her his wife, and that he thought the sole hitch was that father's possible refusal to accept her as a daughter-in-law; and Dora assured him—which was not the truth—that she had never until last night had the least idea that Mr. Hamley loved her or regarded her as other than a daughter. Then

they spoke of their running away together, and even went to the length of comparing their joint possessions. They did not reckon ten pounds between them. Mr. Hamley paid bills to any amount without remark, but he made no allowances, and he disapproved of ladies possessing much pocket-money; and ten pounds was but a small sum on which to begin life for two young people who could not do a hand's turn for themselves. On which they kissed each other again; and Dora wept as she had never wept in her life before; and Sydney felt that he should go mad or do something hideous and desperate if this kind of thing went on much longer. He was in fact wrought up to that pitch of fierce excitement wherein a man is no longer master of himself, where consequences are not calculated, results are not foreseen, and where the impulse of the moment, whatever it may be—the passion that lies uppermost—must be obeyed; and is; because reason, conscience, all that renders humanity human, has gone to sleep and only the animal remains. His own tears maddened him, and Dora's distress but added to his madness. A voice seemed to sound in his ear, just two words repeated again and again, "Kill him! kill him!" it said; "kill him! kill him!"

No ways and means presented themselves to his

fancy, nor when nor how ; only the impulse, only the voice ; " Kill him ! "

As he held his wife strained in his arms as in a vice, she felt his heart throb against her bosom while he groaned with a kind of angry despair that was scarcely human.

" Sydney," she said, in terror, " are you ill, dear ? "

He made no answer, and as the last breath of her words passed over his cheek they heard the door of the house unbolted and unbarred, and presently a man's footstep came heavily down the broad stone flight that led from the door, and on to the gravel of the drive, turning to the left where they were hidden.

Dora clung to her husband in terror. There was no danger of her sobbing now.

" Mr. Hamley ! " she gasped.

They shrank back among the trees, but they dared not go very deep into the wood. The night was still, when sound travels far, and the crisp fallen leaves would have betrayed them. Sydney grasped the heavily-loaded life-preserver he always carried with him in these midnight expeditions—an instrument much after his own pattern, slight and inoffensive to look at, but deadly if used in earnest—then pressed his arm closer round Dora

and whispered to her hoarsely not to be afraid. But she was even the more afraid for his very words; he looked so dark and deadly, like a human tiger somehow.

Her mind took it all in; discovery; the men struggling together and one of them badly hurt; her disgrace; the public scandal and the open shame; and then the enforced poverty after all! A minute ago she had been bewailing her hard fate in being forced to separate; now she shuddered at the harder prospect of being forced to keep together.

The steps came nearer. They were firm and heavy, and with them they heard Mr. Hamley's voice, sometimes speaking to himself, sometimes breaking out into a few false notes of song, and sometimes laughing softly as a man whose heart is too full of joy for thorough self-containment or repose.

He crossed the broad carriage-drive and came along the walk that skirted the croquet-lawn, and so into the shrubbery path where his fiancée and her husband were hidden. They heard his breathing and the very fret of his watch-chain as he passed.

"Dora!" he said in a tone of such abounding love, such intensity of passion, that Sydney felt the blood leap like fire to his face, "My Dora! my

wife! How she loves me! Little angel, how devoted she is to me! I always suspected it,—I knew it—but to hear her say it, ‘I love you!’”—in falsetto—“Gad! it nearly did for me for pleasure! Dora! beauty! little angel! how I love you!”

He went on a few paces, then he came back again, singing softly what he thought was one of Dora’s favourite songs. And then he sat down on a garden chair placed so close to where the young couple stood that Dora thought he must surely hear their breathing and the beating of her guilty, frightened heart.

“What hands she has!” Mr. Hamley said to himself after a moment’s silence. “What lips! That good-night kiss of hers—I thought I should have turned faint and lost my head! How delightful to feel her soft hair and her velvety cheeks—she is like a flower; and she is my own. Dora! her very name is the prettiest in the world. Dora Hamley! They’ll say in London that the M.P. for Milltown has the loveliest little wife in England; and they’ll say right. Not the Queen herself can show such another in all her court! And to think of that young beast Lowe, presuming so high! The wife of the Member for the borough of Milltown is rather a cut above a profligate blackleg and his

son! My Dora; no other man's Dora; only mine! And she loves me so much, and says it so prettily! To think of her saving herself for me; refusing them all because she loved me! Jabez Hamley, you are a happy man to-night! There's not a happier on the whole face of the earth, let him be who he may!"

So he went on talking in broken interrupted sentences to himself; the man's heart too full for sleep, too rich in joy for rest. He felt as if he should have been suffocated in the house, had he stayed there. He had that strange yearning to carry his joy into the infinity of nature which we all have, even the most prosaic of us, the least sensitive and refined, when our cup is very full and the gates of heaven have rolled back and let us in. The passion of happiness that possessed him was almost more than he could bear, and he came out into the fresh night-air to throw its burden on to something stronger and holier than himself.

He had been happy before this in his life; indeed, his life had been singularly blessed, he said to himself. He had been prosperous in all ways, successful on all points of his ambition; but he had never felt as he felt now, so possessed with his joy, so overpowered with his bliss. He had to keep

silence to all the world of his happiness in Dora. To the outside onlookers he must wear crape round his hat and a sorrowful countenance for the due observance of the decencies ; he could tell his secret to none ; but like the man who must whisper what he knew of the king to the reeds, he too must whisper what he felt to the night. It was very un-English, very boyish, but it was nature. His life hitherto had been arid of love. He had married early for ambition, and he had prudently resolved to make that marriage a success. To do this he had not suffered his fancy to stray to the right or the left ; and his very love for Dora had been a growth, not a sudden passion, and never fully confessed even to himself in its intensity, if it had been in its hope, because he had never dared to indulge in it till now. And the first love of a man's life matured at nearly fifty, is a deeper and more absorbing passion than even the most fervid fancy of earlier youth.

He did not sit there long, though it seemed like an age to the two hidden behind the trees listening to his boastful gladness—the one in such chill of abject terror, the other in such fire of torturing rage. Restless, feverish, with his chest expanded and his head held high, he wandered down the



avenue, and presently they heard the gate leading into the wood from the shrubbery creak as it swung back, and the last of his footsteps died away.

Then Sydney, putting Dora from him without a word, without a sign, turning only upon her a pair of flaming eyes burning like fire beneath his dark brows, motioned her silently to the house; while he, drawing a deep breath, shifted his loaded cane to a yet more convenient hold in the middle, and set off with a swift and stealthy pace down the avenue.

"Sydney!" whispered Dora.

But he was gone. Keeping in the shadow of the trees, and with that light walk of his which he had practised so often and which was scarcely more noisy than the tread of a panther, she could neither see nor hear him; and after lingering for a moment, she too turned and ran, and was soon safe in her own room, unseen and unsuspected. No one who had seen her fair pretty face half an hour after, nestled among the lace and linen of her luxurious pillow, sleeping as tranquilly as a child, her cheeks just touched with a pink flush like a monthly rose, her small hand half-hidden among her golden hair, would have imagined that she had just escaped from one danger to herself, while leaving in the

thick of peril the two men who loved her. She was of the tribe *felis femina*, not cruel of nature if she was of need, and preferring her own ease before all other things above or below.

Still softly singing to himself, Mr. Hamley walked on through the little wood, which when he first bought Abbey Holme was the boundary of his possessions. He had a special love for this tangled thicket: it was pretty and picturesque, with a pleasant trout-stream running through, broadening into a fair expanse of water where he kept a couple of swans and some favourite fowl. He remembered how glad he was, years ago, when he walked through this very path and took possession of the wood as master and owner. He had often stolen over the fences and got nuts and blackberries there in his ragged days; he took care that no ragged urchins stole over the fences now for nuts or blackberries!—and he remembered his proud delight in finding himself the lawful master of his former filched Paradise. It was eighteen years ago. How time had passed and prospered with him since then! Year by year he had gathered more, and year by year he would gather more still. His wealth had got to that point when it increases by itself; for spend as much as he could—that is,

as much as he cared to spend—he could not get through all his income. He had that Cragfoot estate to get in yet, he thought; and maybe more land might come into the market, which he would secure. There were outlying bits he was beginning to covet, and that he thought would fit in well with his fields; but for these he could afford to wait.

He was glad about Cragfoot though. He would make it a Dower-house for Dora. Had Patricia Kemball been a sensible girl and done as she ought to have done in her aunt's lifetime, he would have made over the whole concern to her as her portion; now he would give it to Dora, and call it "Dora's Dower," as a remembrance. He laughed right out when he thought of this. It would be a pleasant revenge on that young profligate who had dared to ask him for Dora's hand!

How beautiful the night was! The scented autumn air hanging in a light vapour that shone like silver among the trees, veiling the direct brilliancy of the moon and softening it into a general atmosphere of mild radiance rather than a specialised light, seemed more delightful to him than he had ever known an October night to be, or indeed, any night of any year. It was quite

summer-like he thought, as he took off his hat and flung back his coat, looking about him. He had got now to the Oval; a cleared space by the side of the lake, as the broadened reach of river was called; and stood there bareheaded in the moonlight, watching the white swans floating lazily on the water. His back was towards the house, the chimneys of which could be seen over the tops of the trees in daylight.

Watching the swans, something in their graceful gliding movement struck the imagination of the man whose very soul seemed transformed to-night. It was the whiteness of Dora, the grace of Dora, the caressing, subtle charm of Dora, the purity of Dora. He saw her everywhere; earth and heaven and all forms of loveliness were filled with her, and everything was but a type—a repetition of her excellence and beauty.

“My Dora!” he said aloud. Then, with a sudden rush of feeling, the like of which he had never known before, he cried out as if in an ecstasy; “Thank God for her love!”

A whistling noise as a stick cut sharply through the air, the crash of breaking bone, a stifled cry, a heavy fall, and Mr. Hamley’s life was over; his love, his joy, his prosperity, his vainglory, nothing

more now than a handful of dust fanned by the midnight air—the thought of a man which had passed like a summer's cloud. Had his death been by any other method, had his heart burst in his great joy, had he died by the visitation of God or by a thunderbolt from Heaven, one would have said that he had died at the right moment. To-morrow the ecstasy which had lifted him to-night beyond himself would have withered down into the vulgar narrowness of his everyday life; his soul, which had expanded into poetry, would have shrunk back into its old groove of ignoble ostentation, of insolent self-assertion; and his very love for Dora would by time have become first the mere pride of possession, then indifference, and perhaps have ended in jealousy and estrangement. He would never have been so great again, so near to nobleness as he was to-night; for though the cause of his passionate emotion was a cheat, his feeling was true. The tragedy by which all was over for him in life was a foul and cruel crime, but it gave him a pathos he would never have had else, and crystallized for ever the dignity and sublimer passion of the hour.

As Mr. Hamley fell a slight young figure shot quickly by; plunged again into the shadow of the

wood; leaped wall and fence and gate, going always by circuitous paths till it struck the high road, where running still, always keeping in the shadow, Sydney Lowe soon gained the shelter of his own home as entirely unsuspected and undiscovered as Dora had been. Creeping noiselessly up-stairs, he went into his private room; carefully examined his clothes whence he removed certain damning stains and spots; stirred up the dying embers of the fire, and burned in the flame a heavily-loaded life-preserver, running the lead through a bullet-mould, as he had often done when a boy. And then he went to bed, where he laid as if in an ague fit till the morning. He had obeyed that haunting voice, and committed the crime he had been half-unconsciously meditating for many weeks, and now stood face to face with the consequences. His chance of detection? It all depended on whether he had been seen or not, or if seen recognised. And if seen and recognised, what then was he to do?

He lay there calculating, inventing, his brain on fire, his thoughts incoherent in their activity, half-resolving to leave the place and England to-morrow, then again feeling that his only policy was to remain and trust to his good stars and his own cleverness, should suspicion arise and his name get

bruited abroad. And while he was torturing himself with the criminal's coward fears, James Garth was making his way too, from the wood, carrying a bagfull of game which he had just netted in the preserves. Not half an hour before Mr. Hamley came to the Oval, he had passed through the paths with his snares, and had lifted what his last night's setting had brought him.

For Garth had turned poacher of late days, more as an act of revenge than for any other reason. It pleased the man's savage feeling to rob Mr. Hamley, who he always said had robbed him. It was his crude version of the law which gives an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth ; and he helped himself pretty freely. More than once the head-keeper had warned him. They had been old friends in the days when James held his father's land, and he did not want to be hard on him. Still, his duty was to watch the game, and let no man meddle with it ; and so he said ; and each time he had it to say he spoke more sternly than before. He had been about the preserves to-night as usual, and had seen a figure come out of the little wood and run across the open in the moonlight for a moment, then dart under cover again. It was a younger, slighter-looking man than Garth, it seemed to him, and evi-

dently carrying nothing weighty. But there was not much doubt in his own mind that he had made a mistake, and that it was Garth whom he had seen, when all the circumstances came to light: for who else was it possible to have been? When he and the under-gamekeeper making their rounds the next day, came upon the stiff body of their murdered master lying in the Oval with his skull battered in by one tremendous blow given from behind, and a piece of a white-spotted blue bandana hanging on one of the bushes near, the man's heart stood still; for he recognised the neckerchief as the one James Garth habitually wore, and the whole crime became clear.

"Whosever throat this fits has done it," said the under-gamekeeper pointing to the bush; and the police, when they were sent for, said so too.

And what excuse could Garth make? There, under his bed, was the bag of game; round his neck the torn bandana, with its missing piece found on the bushes close to where Mr. Hamley was lying murdered. There was no denial of the one fact, and the inference was too strong to be gainsaid. The poacher was arrested on suspicion, committed on the capital charge, and sent to jail to stand his trial at the coming assize, Milltown having but one mind



on the matter—that he was guilty. For again and again they asked who else could have done it? Mr. Hamley was not the beloved of all men, but he had no enemies save this gloomy, discontented peasant whose land he had bought, and whom he had thus made his foe for life—and death.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TRUTH AND SEEMING.

THERE is nothing of which a poacher is not capable. Given a pair of hands bold enough to set snares for the squire's game, and you have a heart black enough to compass the squire's murder. This is a logical sequence in the minds of the landed gentry, and they act on it when they have the chance with singular uniformity of feeling. A poacher is the common enemy of all men with game preserves; and they think they do the community good service by getting rid of him on any pretext that will serve.

Whether it is he who is intrinsically bad, or the law which makes him so, does not trouble them. Men in possession are not given to abstract reasoning, and first principles have nothing to do with Acts of Parliament. To break the law has an ugly sound with it to those whose gain is to keep it, and

practical protest against inequitable decrees is a crime where readjustment would pare off some of the golden fringes from the rich man's garments to give decent clothing to the poor. So it is that a poacher has but hard measure meted out to him at the hands of magisterial game preserves ; and class enmity, always bitter, is never more so than when it has to deal with a man who has snared a pheasant or netted a salmon by the right of nature, and against the game law.

Thus, when it became known that James Garth had taken to poaching, his arrest on a charge of murder was quite in the order of things. Discontent and springs together make an amalgam that renders the worst crime of all easy ; and the poor fellow was condemned long before he was tried. When that conclusive bit of white-spotted blue bandana was compared with the yeoman's neckerchief and found to correspond with the torn end, there was then not the shadow of doubt left, nor the chance of escape. The whole thing fitted in piece by piece with as much accuracy as those two ends of torn silk ; and the hypothesis was as clear as demonstrated fact.

Garth had been poaching ; Mr. Hamley, suspecting something, or perhaps only restless from

grief at the loss of his wife, had gone out into the wood and had caught him in the fact. There had been an altercation; and Garth, being ordered off, had gone sullenly away, when he had turned, and creeping noiselessly behind his detector had struck him on the back of the head with some round, heavy instrument, and so had killed him treacherously on the spot. Nothing could be clearer. The game was found under his bed, and the gamekeeper, his own friend, had seen him running across the open. He had not known him at first; at least not for certain in the shimmery moonlight; the man he had seen looked younger and of lighter build, he said, and he had not taken him to be his old friend and mate; but enlightened by after events he reconsidered and corrected his first impression, and was prepared now to maintain, sadly enough, that it was James Garth, and none other, whom he had seen escaping from the place of murder. For you see, said the man, as all Milltown said in concert, who else could it be?

All the bitter words Garth had said, all his discontent and angry despair, Mrs. Garth's loud-voiced passion at the dismissal of her daughter, every small and until now half-forgotten incident, and specially that scene where he had had that

kind of fit, and had cried "Murder!" at the Long Field Gate came back to the memories of those who had heard and seen. And then that torn fragment of bandana! It was a small thing on which to hang a man; but it hanged him nevertheless. All saw in it the finger of Providence, which forces a man who commits a crime to leave some betraying sign by which the old saying that murder will out may be justified; and the finger of Providence was accepted as a guide pointing in the right direction in this instance.

A proved poacher; confessedly out in the preserves on the night of the murder; seen escaping from near the very spot by his friend the gamekeeper, a reluctant if honest witness; and with a fragment of his neckerchief found fluttering in the bushes close to the spot—what could save him? Not the absence of the instrument with which the deed was done; though the woods were searched far and near for something that would fit into that awful wound; not his own protestation of innocence made once and never repeated, for he became sullen on the trial and stood as if he did not care which way the verdict went; not his previous good character, seeing that even good men may lapse and that no saint is sure; not even the current rumour that his

brain was touched, for the jail-surgeon certified his perfect sanity ; nothing that could be urged had any weight in face of the overwhelming force of the circumstantial evidence brought against him, backed by the hypothesis born of his notorious enmity and discontent.

He was tried ; well defended ; but found guilty all the same ; and sentenced to be hanged by the judge in an impressive speech which lost its point so far as the prisoner was concerned, from the simple fact that he had not done that thing for which he was exhorted to repent and condemned to die. But it moved the judge who delivered it and the audience who heard it, and indeed was a fine bit of eloquence full of good, honest human feeling.

After sentence was passed, a petition, headed by Dr. Fletcher but sparsely signed by the rest of the community, was forwarded to the Home Secretary praying for commutation of the capital sentence. The petitioners were either those few who did not believe, in spite of appearances and no one else possible, that James had done this murder—those half superstitious and wholly unreasonable people who have more faith in character than in circumstantial evidence ; or those kindly apologists who believed that he had done it sure enough, but who thought him

mad and therefore not responsible. But the Home Secretary was a strong man, and returned the memorial with the answer that he saw no reason to interfere with the regular course of justice. The prisoner had had a fair trial, and the laws must be obeyed.

There was no help for it then. In heaven there might be a re-arrangement of the sentence, but on earth it was final; and James Garth was hanged within the precincts of the county jail; his last words, while Calcraft was arranging the drop, being "Gentlemen, I am innocent!" as he lifted his wan face to the light and looked as a brave man does when he meets an ignoble doom nobly. But all the thinking and educated people of Milltown said he richly deserved his fate. All save Henry Fletcher; whose defence however had done the poor fellow no kind of good, and himself that amount of harm which comes from the open expression of unpopular opinions. The gentry took grave exception at this continual advocacy of the poor characteristic of him. They said, bitterly, that it did not signify what a common man did, if it would only injure and annoy the rich that mad fellow was on his side. They might all have their throats cut, and he would move heaven and earth to get the interesting criminal off, without a thought for the victim. It was infamous, disgust-

ing, and he ought to be drummed out of society for it.

No one was so indignant as Colonel Lowe; though to make amends no one was so silent as his son. The Colonel liked Henry Fletcher well enough, he said, as they all knew; and he had always disliked that poor Hamley fellow, as also they all knew; and he had never concealed his contempt for him nor kow-towed to him as the rest had done; but when it came to taking sides with his murderer—good heavens! that was another matter. A gentleman may keep aloof from a vulgar upstart and yet not hold with the ruffian who has assassinated him in his own grounds. A petition for a reprieve? No! If Garth could be hanged twice over the punishment would not be more than he deserved; and he, Colonel Lowe, would vote for the second drop. What would become of the country if such crimes as these were winked at? No; none of these sentimentalities suited the Colonel. Gag such mischievous demagogues as Henry Fletcher; let Garth swing; and above all things defend the majesty of the law and keep up the due subordination of classes.

So Garth did swing, and no living soul knew the real truth but one—he who had burnt a slight cane in the fire one October night, and run a lump of



lead through a bullet mould. And no living soul suspected the truth but one—she who had seen her husband steal, with his panther-like tread, on the traces of her lover in the shadow of the wood, and who knew what was in his heart.

After this a subscription was got up for Garth's widow and orphans, and they were shipped off to Australia, as creatures too tainted for the purity of Milltown. They were the victims of circumstances, as so many of us are; martyrs crushed under the wheels of that tremendous car where sits the Justice of the World; the helpless struck down by the blind; sinless Cains bearing the brand unrighteously, but none the less shunned of men because of that unrighteousness. It had been a frightful page in Milltown history: there had never been such a one before; and the citizens felt that the best thing to do was to obliterate the last traces as quickly as possible, and wipe out the name of Garth from the annals of the place.

When Mr. Hamley died and was buried, his will was read; and Dora Drummond was proved his heiress. He had made it hastily—a mere codicil of a few words—the very day before he was murdered, poor man! as if he had had a prevision of his fate, they said, with pale cheeks. Nothing touched the

public imagination more than this. There was a pathos, almost a poetry in the action that counted much in the general indictment against Garth ; and the popular feeling ran high in favour of the murdered member for a disposition of his effects which betokened such a generous and fatherly interest in his young relative.

Thus Dora came into absolute possession of everything untrammelled by a single condition. No guardian, no trustee had been appointed ; nothing but her own sovereign will to administer and distribute all this immense fortune. She was the mistress of Abbey Holme and of the whole estate ; the richest woman for miles round ; before whose wealth poor Julia Manley's hundred thousand pounds shrank into insignificance, and to whom rumour gave even more than she had.

It was marvellous to see how beautiful and beloved she became all at once to Milltown ; how much every one suddenly found out she had been always admired and liked ; and how each person claimed to have specially discerned her worth, and valued it, in the bygone years. Not a house failed in its sympathetic respect for the young heiress, and the Countess of Dovedale was among the earliest condolers. Perhaps she gave a half rueful thought to Lady Maud

who accompanied her ; at any rate, that young noblewoman imagined, as Patricia had so often done in her past world, that her future mother-in-law had a headache, and had best be left to herself during the drive. When they had deposited their cards and driven away, my lady spoke of Miss Drummond quite warmly. She was so perfectly well bred, she said ; and such a lovely creature ! She must be fabulously rich—too rich indeed for a woman ; and she, the Countess, hoped she would marry soon, and marry well. It was too heavy a responsibility for such a young and lovely creature as she was ; she ought to marry into a good family where there was a sensible mother—a woman of the world who could guide and direct her—and where her money would do good and be the means of exalting herself ; one of the aristocracy, in short. To which Lady Maud answered tranquilly ; yes, she ought, and perhaps under the Countess's wing and her own, when she should be Lady Merrian, she would.

All these kindly speculations however, were soon set at rest ; and in a very short time it became known that Dora Drummond was going to marry young Sydney Lowe. People of course found fault with her choice and ridiculed her taste, and cried

what a pity! to each other when they met in the market-place; but a few of the robuster kind—those whose wealth-worship nothing could chill nor shock—affected to have known of this attachment from the beginning, and to find it an exquisite instance of human constancy. To be sure, there were a few awkward whispers about Julia Manley; for the Colonel, to clinch the decision he had good reason to consider wavering, had told every one exultingly of his son's engagement to this young lady, whose excellences he had vaunted in almost poetic terms. Now, within twelve hours of the reading of Mr. Hamley's will, an occasion was found for a rupture between the lovers; and though Julia humbled herself, poor soul, to that point where submission ends and degradation begins, she could not soften her angry idol. He definitively and somewhat coarsely broke with her for ever; and the heart-broken creature fled away with her thousands and her sorrows into Cornwall, where she established herself in a mining town, embraced Wesleyanism, and became a thorn in the side of the Broad Church clergyman.

Dora and Sydney married quite soon after all these stirring events. The world said she was right. She was too young to live alone, and though

Mr. Hamley had made her his heiress, and she owed all imaginable respect to his memory he had not been a near relative; and, considering all the circumstances she need not wait long. Indeed in view of these circumstances she need not have waited long had he been her father. A quiet marriage giving her a companion and protector was far the best thing for her; and they applauded her decision. A month after that melancholy murder then, she was united to Sydney Lowe, very quietly and without parade. Colonel and Mrs. Lowe were the only people at the wedding, Patricia Kemball refusing to be bridesmaid. But the bride was dressed in white, with a long lace veil, all the same as if the wedding had been one according to conventional rule, having no other meaning attached to it.

For one thing she was greatly blamed by all sensible people, her gross imprudence in having no settlements. It was a curious bit of irony that Mr. Hamley's wealth should pass unconditionally into the hands of Sydney Lowe, but the world is full of such. Mr. Simpson urged her to secure at least something; and even the Colonel, not planning villany, thought she would do well to have her own dower properly assured; but Sydney said he would

marry no woman on earth with settlements; and after a private conversation with Dora, she gave in, and his will triumphed as the man's should, he said. No one suspected the root of this imprudent arrangement; and Sydney got great credit for generosity in making a post-nuptial settlement which assured Dora a fair share of her own wealth. For the rest, he made no bad use of her money. Indeed he became rather close-fisted than otherwise, responsibility seeming to have worked a radical change in him somehow, and to have even gone beyond the point of steadying him. He released Cragfoot, paid off his father's debts, and set him on his legs again; but he told him sternly that this was the only thing he would do for him, and that if he fell into the mire again he might pick himself out the best way he could. He was as little like the old Syd, now that he had money, as was the law-respecting king like the law-breaking prince. He was gloomy, stern, morosely pious, would keep no society, and of frightfully irritable nerves. His health broke suddenly, and he was soon startled, soon made angry and uneasy. He had a listening look about his eyes that struck people as odd, and he hated to hear the names of Hamley or Garth. People said he drank in private; some that he ate

opium; others that he gambled. A thousand reasons were whispered from one to the other to account for this extraordinary change in him; and none hit the truth. For so far from any such vice as secret drinking or drugging, he seemed afraid to trust his senses into the keeping of any one or anything but himself, and always slept with locked doors, and a loaded pistol lying handy.

He and Dora got on together pretty well, judging by appearances; which were fallacious. She was too well trained in the way of concealment to show him what she suspected or the world what she felt; nevertheless she often cried in secret, and wished she had never known Sydney Lowe, and that she was once more under the Hamley rule. She had but exchanged masters; and of the two her husband's hand was the heavier.

She got a small amount of feminine consolation however, in the quiet impertinence with which she treated the Colonel and Mrs. Lowe. Once she had courted them by all her pretty arts in vain; now they were obsequious to her, while she snubbed them with merciless good-breeding, and made them regret that they had not had enough prophetic insight to have secured her when they might, and before she had become publicly a prize. This was

their judgment of affairs : and it was as false as all the rest.

On the whole then, the Abbey Holme household, though a failure and a wreck if judged of by truth and principle, was sufficiently well ordered for outward purposes. True, Dora lost her beauty, and became old and haggard suddenly, with a scared look in her eyes that seemed the reflection of her husband's abiding expression of listening and watching; but she was always graceful and conciliating to her world on those rare occasions when she appeared in society, and if Sydney was not popular he had abundant obeisance done to him. No one cried out against him that he had committed theft, forgery, and murder, when he stood up in the Abbey Holme pew on Sundays, and enriched the choir with his clear tenor that sounded above all the rest. Nor when he sat on the bench and leaned ever to the side of rigour and righteousness, did his brother magistrates denounce him as a greater criminal than the poor half-witted clods whom he judged so severely. What was done, was done; and no one knew or ever would know; and for the rest he passed through life in the odour of respectability, beloved by none, known by none, bearing ever with him the consciousness of crime and the



belief in his own eternal damnation, but bowed down to by all. Was he not the master of Abbey Holme, and the wealthiest man for miles round? Does the world ask more, or seek to know more than this?

Patricia spent her days tranquilly enough at the Hollies in the midst of love and duty. There were no brilliant meteors in her sky, but no clouds and no storms; it was sunlight of the best kind—the sunlight of affection, contentment, and a pure conscience. Her happy girlhood had passed for ever, but it had left a womanhood greater and nobler than itself had been; a womanhood of deeper thought and higher aims—yes, and of a more exalted love than would have come to her had she remained untaught of sorrow.

Yet she was always under a cloud at Milltown, and she never lived down the vague disrepute that hung about her fair fame. Every one said that she had done something very wrong once, though no one knew exactly what it was; and the Fletchers were too “queer” themselves to reinstate her by their respect. Her very severance too from Dora, told against her; and, as the world argued, if she could have estranged one so sweet and amiable and forgiving as Mrs. Sydney Lowe, what must she not

have done, what must she not have been ! She was conscious of this public disfavour, which she neither braved nor feared. She knew that she had not deserved it, so bore with equanimity the high estate and public honour of those who had done the wrong, and the general condemnation of herself who had only suffered by it. Between truth and seeming she had chosen the better part, and she never regretted her election.

Years passed before Gordon returned, but years that did good work in both. When the drift-time was over, and they stood once more together hand in hand on the seashore as in the old days, she was no longer a girl living only in the joy of her own youth and love and innocence, but a woman who had learnt the deeper meaning of life through the high teaching of suffering and trial ; a woman self-consecrated to live, like the Fletchers, by principle rather than expediency ; for truth, not seeming ; for the inner law of nobleness, not the outer gain of pleasure. And he too was no longer the mere boy who had the boy's hope and the boy's courage, but a man who had learnt like herself something of the deeper meaning of the Great Riddle, and had set himself to live according to his knowledge.

She and Gordon were poor enough when they

married; and Dora, now that she was no longer afraid of Patricia, knowing by experience how entirely she might trust her silence and loyalty, pitied them profoundly from the luxurious depths of her gorgeous, loveless, miserable home. She would have helped them generously, if they would have taken help at her hand. But Patricia, though she had long ago forgiven her freely and fully—long ago resolved to bear that burden of shame for her to her life's end, patiently and faithfully—would never enter into terms of friendship with her again. Besides; though poor in the world's goods she was infinitely richer in heart and spirit than the faded, frightened, melancholy mistress of Abbey Holme; the wife of the man who slept with locked doors and a loaded revolver by his side, and who had bad dreams and believed in his own eternal destruction.

She never felt so keenly how far better truth is than seeming, and love than riches, as when, one summer's evening, she and the Fletchers and Gordon were standing on the high cliff road, looking at the golden sunset just now flooding earth and sky with that glory which no words, no pigments, can possibly describe. They were watching the gradual passing of the gold to crimson,

and then to deeper purple, in that quiet, half-entranced way which makes silence so eloquent when a carriage drove slowly past. It was the Abbey Holme carriage, containing Dora and her husband. Dress, appointment, equipage—all were of the costliest kind, the most absolute perfection. The land they drove over was their own; the men they passed did homage to them, their masters; they had conquered fortune and distanced justice; they were above even the accidents of life; and they had means to gratify every conceivable desire. But the inner misery of the faces that looked out from those superb surroundings sufficiently confessed their worthlessness.

“Well! for all their money I would not exchange places with those people,” said Gordon, as they passed. “It is not what we have, but what we are, that tells; and of the two we are the more to be envied—what do you say, Pat?”

She looked up into her husband’s handsome, manly face, bending down to hers with such frank and trustful love.

“I think so,” she said earnestly.

“And I know it,” said Henry Fletcher taking her hand on his arm. “Between Dora and Patricia the world would make no doubt which was the more

to be envied ; but I fancy the judgment of God will not go with the verdict of the world ; and that truth and seeming were never at greater odds than they are and have been all through the history of these two girls ! ”

“ Thank God the truth has come to my share ! ” said Gordon fervently. “ I should have done ill with a whited sepulchre. Don’t you remember, Pat, how I always counted on your true heartedness ? ”

She laughed a little shyly, and blushed vividly.

“ Yes,” she said, looking at him tenderly. “ I remember how good you always were to me ! And so long as you and these dear ones are satisfied with me I am quite happy. And I don’t think people want much more than love, and that their own consciences should not condemn them to make life only sweet ! ”

“ Dear child,” said Catherine caressingly. “ How sweet life must be to you then ! ”

“ To us all ! ” she answered.

“ Yes,” answered Gordon ; “ to us all ! ”

THE END.



